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A NOBLE FOOL

FLORENCE EVERARD



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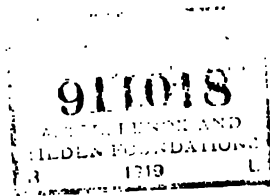


A NOBLE FOOL

BY
FLORENCE EVERARD



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A NOBLE FOOL

CHAPTER I

A PEDESTAL lamp—the only modern article of furniture in the great, gaunt room—disseminated a light, soft, but disturbed in its steady radiance by the flickering of some half-dozen candles. It was a hot July evening; the windows were flung wide open; and from a bough crowded with bloom and buds, which swung backward and forward at the caprice of a light breeze, there stole into the room a faint perfume of roses.

The light fell upon the old carved mantel that reared itself to the ceiling; on the deep, open fireplace with its iron dogs; on the great oak bedstead, with its hangings of faded, limp brocade; on the almost threadbare rugs scattered over the polished floor; on the stiff, straight-backed chairs; the whole seeming to embody a tale of past glory, and present decay, which made itself felt, bearing fruit in an unutterable depression.

By the wide, empty hearth a man sat, a violin lying across his knees. His head was bent, not with age, for he was young, his hands toyed idly with the instrument, and his attitude expressed a gloom in keeping with his surroundings. He was

a man of not more than nine and twenty, with a fine head and deep-set, melancholy eyes which every now and again wandered, fascinated, yet awed, towards the bed, whence came the labored breathing of a woman. The lamplight shone upon the wasted form, the outlines dimly revealed beneath the worn silk coverlet, and on the face, startling in its wonderful, unearthly beauty, that seemed to burn and glow as if in defiance of Death's outstretched hand; as if it would affright and stay that grim angel by very force of its intensity; a woman whose three and thirty years of life had been stormy and tempestuous beyond the ordinary, whose soul in its extremity refused to look on its summons as a release, but as a surrender, every inch of whose way should be fought to the deep-rolling music of passion's thunder, the wild, indomitable will yielding only by stress of physical weakness, beating its wings in a last defiance, not meekly folding them. Tangled masses of red-gold hair hung in disorder over the pillows, and her amber eyes shone with a lambent fire from beneath their heavy white lids.

"Play!" she commanded abruptly, addressing the man over by the fireplace.

He started, and his hands clasped the violin as if in obedience, then they fell listlessly over the instrument, which gave forth a wail of discord.

"How can I, Lenore?" he expostulated.

She put out her hand with an imperious ges-

ture. "Play," she repeated. "You can not refuse the dying."

Reluctantly he raised the violin to his shoulder, and drew his unwilling bow over its strings. A minor chord swept across the room like a sob.

The sick woman raised herself on her elbow. "Faster!" she cried, "faster! Give me something devilish. Let me hear the clangor of hell, the tramp of its armies! Back!" she added fiercely, as a young, slender girl, little more than a child, rose from her knees by the bed, and leant over the sick woman in an agony of expostulation. "What can you know of my need? You, who have had no part in my life, how can you share in my death?"

The girl shrank back to her knees, with a heart-rending wail of "Mother!"

"Play, Rodney, as I tell you," the elder woman reiterated with compelling passion.

As if bewitched, and under a spell, he obeyed her. Strange, soul-rending, awful melodies filled the room with demoniacal grandeur. All passions seemed in conflict, thought itself convulsed. The dying woman crushed her hands down on her panting bosom, as if to steady the wild heart-throbs that in their fierce delight half-choked her. And on played the man, as if possessed, his artist soul yielding to the horrible fascination of the moment.

It was a scene weird enough. The long, softly lighted room, so large that the further corners were in deepest shadow, vague outlines only showing

formlessly from out the gloom, the old carved bed that had something almost tomb-like in its form, its beautiful burden, and the kneeling figure of the young girl, with her bowed head buried in the coverlet as if to shut out the sound of that fearsome music. But even so, it penetrated to the inmost being of Dorothy, and seemed to hold the pulse of life in a throe of anguish that was like unto death. With a wild, inarticulate cry, she rose to her feet, and stumbled across the room, her face white and strained with a look of suffering pitiable in one so young. She flung her hands violently outwards, and wrenched the violin from the man, a horrible discord breaking across the harmony.

"I can not bear it!" she cried. "It is not right, I know it is not! Oh, mother!" she wailed, turning to the bed and flinging herself down beside it; "oh, forgive me, but I could not help it! Oh, think of other things! Have you not one little word of love for me, your child?"

She rose to her feet blindly, a frightened sob escaped her, then she stood, held in horror by the expression on the beautiful, dying face. It was one of hate, vindictive hate.

"Go!" the sick woman cried. "Go, you puling baby! How dared you come between me and that which I had desired! Almost my soul had forgotten its agony. Away from my sight, lest I curse you. Go on, Rodney. I will not have you stop."

But he shook his head despairingly. The spell

was broken; he could not join the links so violently jarred asunder. He got up and walked over to the bed.

"Lenore," he said, "why not do as she says—think of—other things?"

She broke across his words with a laugh, bitter, mocking. "Other things! My love for you! Your love for me!" Again the wild music of her laugh, more terrible even under the circumstances than the wild song of the strings had been. Then with a sudden change of voice, in a key infinitely caressing in its passionate wooing, she murmured, taking the artist's hands in her hot, dry fingers: "Your love, did I say? Oh, Rodney, why could you not love me? I was beautiful, I may say so now, and I loved you as well as any man need wish. Why could you not answer me in the key I desired? Why can you not love me even now? Is it too late? Ah, no! Love is strong enough to close the bars on death. Love me, and I will live. I will——" She raised herself on the bed, and tried to draw him towards her, murmuring his name, then she broke off abruptly; the reluctant yielding of his hands to her dying clasp had not escaped her. His voice, as he began to speak, had the same half-shrinking acquiescence of his touch in its tones:

"Lenore, Lenore, why torture yourself and me by vain regrets, striving for what can not be! Surely in this hour, other thoughts——"

"Other thoughts!" she mocked. "What thoughts? Of God and heaven, and angels?"

Give those to her," indicating the crouching figure by the open window, with a scornful wave of her hand. "They are not for me—no, my friend, I am no hypocrite. It is too late, at this hour, to wrap myself in woman's mantle of dissemblance. I lay my soul bare before you, and it is filled with you. How can you, with your artist nature, be so cruelly cold? I am beautiful, I am a woman—the few years between us, though the balance is on the wrong side, the woman's, why should they count? Why can not you love me? Tell me that you do, just once before I die. What does it matter if you lie, so long as you cheat a dying woman into one moment of happiness! Kiss me, Rodney!" She drew his unwilling head down to her, and kissed him fiercely on brow, eyes and lips, then fell back exhausted, and lay for a moment silent, looking at him with sullen, resentful eyes.

The girl Dorothy crept timidly from the window to the bed, and stood there, like an interloper, watching, listening, not daring to intervene.

"Almost I could hate you," the words came from the sick woman, in a voice now growing dull and weak. "Who will waken the man's heart within you, since I have been powerless? May she be as wretched as I have been! May it prove a curse to you, a weight to drag you down to me! May we meet some day, in the hereafter, if there be one, and then may you tell me that at last you understand!" A temporary strength of revengeful passion upheld her, and her voice rang

out clear and strong; then she flung her arms upwards with a wild beating of the air and a gasping sound burst from her lips; a crimson stain dyed the coverlet with its ghastly seal, and, with a few fluttering breaths, the spirit of Lenore Deming winged its flight, and left its empty casket of clay, silent witness to the beauty which had been so extraordinary in life.

With a convulsive movement of natural terror Dorothy first shrank away from the bed, as Rodney Fairfax leant over the still form and felt for any sign of life. The sight of his hand, laid reverently, though it was, on the dead woman, roused in her a sudden fierce sentiment overcoming fear. She approached him and drew away his hand: "You can do no good now, you had better go."

He turned and looked at her. "If you wish."

She bowed her head silently, and without one backward glance he left her. The burden of the girl's sixteen years seemed all at once to weigh heavily upon her. In that long, silent farewell of the dead mother, who had defrauded her of love, and left her young life barren of sweet remembrance, Dorothy Deming sounded depths of anguish that put to flight forever the careless grace of childhood, and crowned her with the stamp of womanhood and suffering.

With reverent hands she drew the shades, then softly closing the door behind her, she went forth from the presence of the dead, its shadow heavy upon her heart.

CHAPTER II

THE Jersey hills were bathed in a misty haze that foretold another stifling day; even the broad, fair river seemed hardly to have awakened from sleep; it flowed sluggishly, grayly between its banks; all nature was apparently wrapped in lethargy; here and there glistened the white sails of some slowly moving yacht, and the breast of the river was dotted with brown specks—boats rising and falling at anchor; while down by the river's edge wound the shore railroad, the long stream of cars blotting the landscape like a huge black serpent. And the old Deming homestead, part frame, part brick, mantled in silence, stood like a sentinel overlooking the river.

The sound of an opening window, a light foot-fall, and Dorothy Deming came out upon the slope, half rock, half lawn, which, in the rear of the house, slanted almost down to the water's edge. She shaded her eyes for a moment, as if the light pained her, and her young face was very grave and sad. The horror of her mother's death had fastened itself upon her, the memory of the last words spoken to her: "away from my sight, lest I curse you," was eating into her very heart. In what was she different from others, what had she done, that Fate had so cruelly denied her that which even the lowest, pitifullest creature on earth could claim as a right, a mother's love?

She started slightly as another footfall sounded on her ears, and the next moment Rodney Fairfax was standing by her.

"Dorothy," he began, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes?" she answered questioningly, yet with a certain listlessness, as if all interest was lacking. She did not even look at him as she spoke. A vague resentment was stirring her; his presence was unwelcome. She thought of her mother's love for him, and the memory of her wild avowal of it, her dreadful passion, riotous even in the presence of Death, filled the daughter with shame, and brought with it a sudden unreasoning anger against the man who had been the cause of it. What mattered it that he had been innocent, that *he* had held aloof, but had he not lived, there had been no birth of what to the young, innocent mind seemed a disgrace, a shame. Never, she thought, would she lose the memory of her mother's wild words, that passionate, barely yielded embrace. She turned shudderingly from the reminding presence of the man by her side; although, before, she had yielded him a girl's reverent worship, ideal, remote.

His sensitive temperament received the impression at once of something alien in her attitude.

"I know," he began, with a certain deference, "it seems crude, painful, to approach you—now—but there are certain things we must speak of—arrangements——"

She faced round on him. "Of course—I understand! Oh! I begin to understand many

things—crude, and as you say, painful——” She broke off abruptly and partly turned away from him; then, as if against her will, she turned back and looked again at him.

He gazed at her in astonishment. The tone and manner were those of a woman, oddly out of keeping with her girlish appearance. He eyed her critically; his keen perception took note of the promise of beauty, though at present the tall figure was too slight, the carriage unformed. He almost shuddered as he saw the primitive arrangement of her at present chiefest beauty, the thick mass of dead-leaf hair, that had less of gold and more of warm red and brown in it than the mother’s, and which was strained tightly back from a broad low brow, hanging in a heavy plait below her waist. A pair of deep greenish eyes returned his gaze calmly, and he felt confirmed in his recently born opinion, that at some future day she would be, if not a beautiful woman, yet one of striking individuality. The evolvment of these ideas had taken him longer than he thought for, and he was reminded by a growing look of bewilderment on the girl’s face, that she expected something.

“I wanted to tell you,” he said, “that everything is arranged. It will be to-morrow.”

There was a hesitation in his manner. Not yet could he bring himself to speak quite calmly of the woman who had, in spite of her mad and foolish love, been very near to him.

“You are very good,” assented Dorothy

quietly. Her eyes traveled wistfully to the river. A large excursion boat was plowing its way along, crowded with its human freight, its white frothing trail extending far behind it.

A long-drawn sigh escaped the girl. She turned impulsively to the man by her side. "Oh, if I could but get away from it all, begin life afresh in some unknown place!"

A pitiful smile curved his lips. It was terribly sad to hear this young thing uttering such a wish; but her words conveyed a suggestion to him, the possible solution of a problem that had been troubling him—her future.

"Have you given any thought as yet, as to your future plans?" he asked.

She lifted her startled gaze to his. "My plans? I have none. I know nothing."

He felt suddenly relieved at her tone, by her manner. There was in both a lapse into the helplessness of childhood, placed unexpectedly in some foreign position, which more plainly than words seemed to appeal to him for counsel.

"My poor little girl, how should you know! To-morrow—afterwards—I will talk to you—help you if you will allow me—in fact, I am afraid you can not help yourself. You have no relations? but few friends?"

"None . . . save you," she acquiesced hopelessly. "My father died when I was a mere baby, and you know, all my life, until the last three months, I have been at the convent. Since then—why need I tell you?—she did not care for

me to make friends—and she—she wanted none—except yourself.”

“Yes, I know,” he assented gloomily.

The awful isolation of this young creature, just approaching womanhood, oppressed him beyond words. How was he to help her? True, he had money, plenty—a fortune, large even in the present day, a fortune, which had enabled him to gratify to the full his roving, vagabond instincts; but the Bohemian life he had delighted in had removed him from any sphere of usefulness to her. His individuality invariably demanded, sought and found—only to form a part of—the little artistic clique in any place in which he sojourned. Musicians, poets, artists, they were his comrades; their thoughts, their manners, in a word, their life were his. And among them when he had disarmed the distrust of his wealth, when he had proved himself as good a Bohemian with it, as they without it, he always found a welcome. It followed, then, that women did not enter much into his scheme of life. Vaguely floating in the clouds of his fancy, he sometimes saw an ideal female form with pale gold hair, spirituelle, snow-pure—the vision of an artist, not a man. And yet for the past three months he had been chained as it were to the side of Lenore Deming. Hour after hour, evening after evening, he had passed with her, in that dismal old house overlooking the Hudson. And why? Over and over he had asked himself the question in the past months, and now, was almost ashamed of the relief with

which he realized, he would have no further need to reiterate the query. He had not loved her—not even with passing passion. She had been a curious study to him; she had appealed to the artistic sense in him, stimulating in him new perceptions; at first she had veiled her feeling for him under the guise of a sweet and womanly interest half maternal, half sisterly, at once novel and solacing to one so little intimate with women. But soon he had found she was bringing a disquieting element into his life, fascinating by force of its weird and smoldering fire. That reluctant acceptance of her dying kiss had been the only caress interchanged between them. He had no guilty memories to throw their shadows between him and the young girl who had turned her back upon him, and who was now looking over the river as if forgetful of his presence. He experienced a feeling of regret that he had not been able to return the love of the beautiful woman, who would never be able to crave it again. Why could he not have suffered an answering and mighty emotion? He knew that his life would not be complete without it. But as yet, not even its shadow had passed over his heart. He sighed and looked again at the girlish figure in its simple white gown; not yet had she donned the trappings of woe. What was to be done with her? So young, so sad, so alone; moneyless almost, friendless quite.

He knew that the annuity that had kept the roof over the heads of mother and daughter and en-

abled them to live, died with the former; that the old homestead was mortgaged to its full value; that perhaps a hundred dollars or so might be saved from the wreck, but that was all; and as he stood there a deep anger, a great revolt against the dead woman's unutterable selfishness, rose up in his heart. That Lenore Deming had dared ignore the hostage she had left to Fate, leaving Dorothy defenseless to the mercy of a world only too cruel and greedy in its grasp of youth unprotected, made him recoil with the horror of it.

Fortunate, indeed, was it for Dorothy that Destiny had thrown her upon the mercy of a man who, despite an utter lack of what the world calls religion, professing no faith, with many free and extraordinary views, still was endowed with a singularly pure nature, combined with a chivalrous respect for honor and truth. That his manner of proving his sense of responsibility, his procedure in carrying into execution his ideas, was not what the world approved, was a matter of little moment to him. That he had the courage of his convictions, right or wrong though they might be, was to him of infinitely greater importance.

She had strolled away from him, down the steep paths to the boundary fence dividing the garden from a piece of waste ground running to the railway. Slowly, thoughtfully, he followed her. She heard him coming, and turned to meet him. She found him looking at her with a sorrowful intentness which embarrassed her.

"What is it?" she asked at length, constrained by his silence.

"I have been thinking a great deal of you," he replied. "To-morrow I will tell you the result. In the meantime, promise me not to trouble yourself about that bugbear, the future. You have been crying," he added suddenly. Then remorsefully, "Forgive me. I should not have noticed."

He turned silently and walked back to the house, leaving her there alone.

"I ought to hate him, I suppose" thought Dorothy, "and yet, after all, it was not his fault that she cared. He has done no evil. Why should I visit her sin on him—and yet—and yet she was my mother!"

Her young eyes saw all facts distorted, and it seemed to her that her mother had been guilty of absolute sin in allowing her wild love to drown even the memory of death.

"Oh!" thought the girl passionately, "if I suffered an unsought for, unrequited love, I should die of its shame if avowed!"

And yet that dead woman, lying so still and quiet in the great lonely chamber overlooking the river, deaf to passion's farthest reaching note, had seemed to glory in her shame; and when later Dorothy stood looking wonderingly on the pallid features, it appeared as if they had become set in a new expression—victorious, invincible.

With a shudder the girl turned away and left the room.

The next day Lenore Deming was laid to rest.

On that same evening Fairfax requested Dorothy to grant him her consideration of the plan he had thought out for her future. She consented apathetically. Stunned by the shock of the recent happenings, oppressed by the emptiness of the old house, this future, that for some reason or another it seemed necessary to arrange, held for the moment nothing of promise or of terror to Dorothy.

When Fairfax told her he proposed to constitute himself her guardian, to assume all responsibility as to her future maintenance and education, she acquiesced without question or demur; nothing appeared to be of any real consequence. Her uninterested submission irritated him. She might surely have shown some gratitude for his consideration, he thought; for, after all, what claim had she upon either his time or his money! It is distinctly disturbing, when one has resolved, after much inward and troubled debate, to enter upon a course of action likely to lay one open to much ridicule and possible abuse, to find the effort received with an utter want of appreciation of its importance.

Fairfax had never been crossed in his desire nor checked in his impulse, and he now showed plainly that he was annoyed. Finding that he did not proceed to unfold his plans, but that he remained strangely silent, Dorothy looked at him, waiting, and the light in which her apathy must have appeared to him suddenly flashed upon her.

"Forgive me," she pleaded penitently; "indeed you are good, and I am glad that I am not to go back to the convent; I could not bear it now."

"No! I had thought——"

"Oh, not that! The sisters are all that is good, but they would never understand, how should they? They would expect me to be the same as when I left them, as I was—before——" She ceased and looked at him beseechingly.

Again he was silent. It was horrible to know that the eyes of this child had been violently opened to an ugly and passionate side of life, against which her youth should have been a shield.

"Then we must think of some other plan," he said. He looked at her, unaware of the intentness of his gaze, as he tried to reason out something feasible. Inspiration was vouchsafed him. "How would you like to go to Paris for a time?" he suggested; "no—not to school" (answering the protest in her face)—"we could find some nice family where you would be received *en intime*, and yet with the privileges and consideration that would be accorded a paying guest. It would give you finish—manner—in short fit you for the position in life, which——" He paused abruptly. Heavens! what position could be offer her; he, an unmarried man, a Bohemian at heart! But she cut across his train of thought: "That is a good idea—I should like it—it would be a change!"

"Very well, so be it," he replied. "As soon

as necessary arrangements are completed I will take 'my ward' to France."

He was relieved by her ready acquiescence. She would be off his hands for two years at least—then she would be eighteen—and then——? Well, the answer to that question could remain in abeyance for two years, and in the meantime the unconventionality of his position, untinged by any sentiment, rather amused him.

Two weeks later Rodney Fairfax and his ward, Dorothy, sailed for Havre on the steamship *Savoie* of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique.

CHAPTER III

ONE early June evening three men, smoking their after-dinner cigars, were lounging in different attitudes of negligent comfort on the terrace of an old house on the Thames, midway between Richmond and Twickenham, as the twilight deepened over the lawn that sloped down to the river, which, gray and silent, seemed to cast a spell over the spirit of the smokers.

"By Jove, Fairfax, this is a jolly old place of yours! I think I'll quarter myself on you for a month, while I'm finishing off my book, eh?" The novelist, Derwent Boisey, laughed lazily, and tilted back his chair, putting his feet up on the the low balustrading of the terrace wall.

"That's a capital idea, Boisey," chimed in

the youngest of the three men, "and when Fairfax is in the mood he will soothe your troubled mind, and inspire new ideas with the strains from his violin—and perhaps you won't either of you object to my playing chorus, if I promise to hold my tongue when I'm told!" and Sir Geoffrey Carstairs laughed, a rolling, hearty sound, which was infectious.

"Ah!" said their host, flipping the ash off his cigar, "it's all very well for you fellows to arrange things, but the fact is—there is going to be a change here."

"What! Are you going to be married—bring a wife here, Fairfax?" Boisey asked.

Sir Geoffrey slapped Fairfax on the knee.

"Sly dog! And you never even gave us a hint!"

"Rot!" retorted Fairfax. "You chaps are all wrong. It's not a wife I'm expecting, but—my ward!"

"A ward? Oh, a boy!" ejaculated Sir Geoffrey, relieved.

"No . . . not a boy . . . a girl!" Rodney Fairfax drawled, looking at the two men with a quizzical glint in his eye.

"Good Lord!" said Boisey, drawing himself together, and sitting squarely in his chair, "what are you going to do with it?"

"Aren't there nurseries and . . . things?" suggested Carstairs vaguely but hopefully.

"Or schools?" supplemented Boisey.

Fairfax laughed softly. "Too old for either.

She's eighteen . . . and I'm going to Dover tomorrow to bring her here. She's been in a school in Paris for the last two years. I placed her there when I adopted her."

Fairfax looked disconcerted for a moment, when both his guests burst into hearty guffaws of laughter. "Oh, it's all right for you fellows to laugh!" he remonstrated. "I had a perfect right to adopt her, hadn't I? I had plenty of money, she had none—besides there were other reasons——"

"Of course!" remarked Boisey sententiously, whereat Sir Geoffrey winked his eye at him, provoking a kick of protest from Fairfax.

"You chaps are all wrong——"

"Well, come to think of it, we are," Boisey admitted—"the young lady is eighteen, you say—you are thirty, or thereabouts. Yes, that relieves you of the possibility of malign suggestion—but—on the other hand it lays you open to the likelihood of all sorts of other things——"

"Yes," interposed Carstairs, "you'll probably make an ass of yourself in a week, and fall in love with the girl."

"You're more likely to do that, Geoff!" retorted Fairfax. "You're such a susceptible youth! As for Boisey, I suppose there's no danger for him—he's a matter-of-fact, cold-blooded devil! All the imagination he possesses he writes into pounds, shillings, and pence, and leaves none over for his personal use!"

"But why did you never mention this interest-

ing situation before?" questioned Boisey, ignoring the taunt.

"Why didn't he?" chaffed Carstairs. "Why, because he wanted to keep her all to himself!" He laughed at his own perspicuity.

"I didn't tell you because, truth to say, I never thought about it!" retorted Fairfax. "I'd fixed her up in Paris, with a good family, to finish her education and—er—all that, so I didn't have to think about her; all I had to do was to send the quarterly checks—but now?" He stopped with a smile and drew at his cigar.

"Well, it gets over me, it does, by Jove!" affirmed Sir Geoffrey. "Now, if old Boisey had sprung a little affair like this upon us it would have seemed all right. It might have been expected of him. I remember what Mrs. Baldwin once said of him——"

"Stop that, Geoff!" interrupted Boisey. "We can readily understand that anything the mamma of Violet had to say to you would be interesting to—you, but second-hand opinions, like second-hand furniture, go cheap——"

"The fact that Mrs. Baldwin has the good fortune to be the mother of such a charming daughter as Violet has nothing to do with her opinion of you!" returned Sir Geoffrey. "She said she considered Derwent Boisey as a *novelist* quite an interesting personage, but as a *man* she imagined he could be a quixotic fool—but that involves another story, as our friend Kipling hath it!"

"Be quiet, Carstairs, and let's have Fairfax's

tale, it will prove more interesting than yours, I hope. Tell us all about the girl!" and Boisey turned to Fairfax expectantly.

"The tale can be briefly told," responded the latter. "You chaps know what a roving sort of beggar I am. Two years ago I was in New York, a place I abominate, though I was born there—by accident, as it were—a fact I am always glad to remember, for the event was intended to take place in our old home on Long Island; my father and mother were hurrying back from Europe with that idea, but her illness overtook her sooner than was anticipated. I have always had a sentimental regret on the subject, ridiculous of course——" A dreamy, retrospective expression had stolen over his countenance, as his thoughts wandered away from his subject.

"Yes, but—?" reminded Carstairs.

Fairfax laughed. "The petticoat possibility interests you more, doesn't it, Geoff? Well, I had been on a hunting expedition—not much hunting, and a good deal of rambling—in the Adirondacks, when I met a woman—the mother of my ward—an extraordinary and fascinating being, with whom I soon became on terms of intimate acquaintance. The whole episode was peculiar. I was never in love with her, but every artistic sense I possessed was stimulated and enthralled by her. She could make me fiddle as I never fiddled before or since—the violin sang for her what she would; no love songs, tender and languishing, but harmonies of stupendous power,

and direful meaning. Never since have I been able to render those melodies that came, whence I know not; went, whither I am unable to follow. Every mental, intellectual, aye, and sensuous perception was quickened into vivid life—but that was all."

"What a disappointment!" murmured Boisey *sotto-voce*.

Fairfax caught the words. "A disappointment? Yes, you are right. I would give a good deal to be swayed by one of those tremendous emotions I can imagine, have witnessed, but have never experienced. The end of the episode was tragic enough. She died, and left a child—a girl of sixteen then—left her penniless, friendless, uncared for. As I said before, I had plenty, the girl had nothing. She is coming here. I meet her to-morrow at Dover. And, I say, you two, I want you both to come here to dinner, the day after and meet her. That's agreed, eh?"

"Of course!" they assented.

As they rose to go Fairfax repeated his invitation. "Be sure to come at 6.30 sharp," adding as an afterthought, "The girl must have some society, you know!"

Outside the grounds, Boisey and Carstairs looked at each other. "Some society!" quoted the latter.

"Yes, and he asks two men to provide it!" added Boisey. "Good Heavens! Carstairs, what's going to be the outcome? The fellow doesn't know a woman in the neighborhood."

You're a lone bachelor with no mother or sisters, and I am a vagabond Bohemian—Society! A girl of eighteen the ward of a man of thirty, and no chaperon to quiet the tongues of the scandal lovers! How's it going to end?"

CHAPTER IV

THE two years had passed away, the period of probation for Dorothy, of relief to Fairfax, for as he had informed Boisey and Carstairs the only duty incumbent upon him during this time had been that of signing and forwarding the regular checks to the French custodian of his ward. Two years in which he had lightly cast aside all sense of responsibility; two years in which the conflicting sentiments—of repulsion and attraction—the former, it had seemed to Dorothy, obligatory, the latter purely personal—had softened into the pallid obscurity of a faded pastel, while the present with its prospect of change, of meeting with the man to whom she owed so much, caused her heart to beat with all the ardent expectation of youth.

Dorothy had thought of Fairfax constantly in those two years, the man whom in her youthful, untrained temper she felt she ought to hate, who yet was her benefactor; she was to owe everything to him. "I could not, as you know, give her—living—what she desired; dead, I will do the only thing I can, in reparation for her death-

hour's agony, by caring for you, her child." That was what he had said to her, before parting from her in Madame D'Auville's parlor, two years before, in Paris. And might it not be, Dorothy's own heart had often made sweet suggestion, that her duty was to him, this man who had burdened himself with the guardianship of her young life; not to her who had refused her her birthright, a mother's love; had spurned her almost with a curse. Insensibly he had crept upwards in her imagination, until at the time of her departure from Paris to join him in England, he occupied a niche all his own. She counted the hours until she should see him. Would the resentment she tried to feel when in gloomy mood gain the upper hand, or would she like him for himself? Sunshine follows cloud; in the end Dorothy always smiled.

The crucial period was at hand, and now the strange experiment was to begin. The Calais boat was approaching Dover, and he was already on the dock awaiting its arrival. As it neared sufficiently for him to distinguish the passengers, he saw a tall girlish form standing a little apart in a perfectly motionless attitude, as one searching for some expected face. Instinct told him it was Dorothy. He watched her curiously as she came down the gang-plank a few minutes later; there was an air of distinction about her that pleased him. He went forward leisurely to meet her. She had a nosegay of fading flowers given to her by a schoolmate at parting, a box of Ameri-

can candy and a book, encumbering her hands, as he put his hand out to greet her.

"Dorothy!" he cried with unaffected pleasure. As she raised her eyes (and he saw that they were large and limpid, and of hue indistinguishable in that first interchange of glances) she crimsoned from brow to throat, and her eyes seemed to look far down into his with a strange nervous intensity; and then slowly, one by one, she dropped her flowers, her candy and her book.

Smiling, he stooped, and gathering them up, restored them to her, but as his hands touched hers, the flowers fell to earth again, and lay crushed and forgotten beneath her feet. She grasped the dainty sweetmeat box convulsively, while he retained the novel. That first long gaze, the memory of which was still confusing him with a faint sweet thrill of pleasure, had changed with her the girl's remote but worshipped ideal into the actual. From that moment she knew she loved him. And he, looking at her, had no conception of the moment, of the hour; he felt only a distinct pleasure in her satisfactory appearance, and the absence of any suggestion of her former attitude of constrained coldness.

"You are tired?" he asked, more by way of saying something than for any palpable reason.

She laughed, and he noticed approvingly that her mouth, though rather large, opened over very regular and small white teeth, and that the curve of her short upper lip was charmingly suggestive of a ready wit and bright fancy.

"Tired! I! Oh, no, I am never tired. It was good of you to come and meet me. I have thought so much of this home-coming, and—of my obligations to you!" she added softly.

He looked pleased. This was even more agreeable than he had anticipated. There was a decided piquancy in the thought that this pretty, thorough-bred-looking young woman belonged to him, that her future lay in his hands.

"I hope you will like me, that you will not find me a nuisance," she said later, when they were discussing a well-served little dinner *à deux* at the Lord Warden.

"I have no doubt at all on the subject," he laughingly replied. "Most people would say the only fear might be that I should like you too well." Quite untouched as yet, he was able to make his speech frankly, and never noticed how it made her wince, never noticed the troubled look that quickly awakened and vanished in the long-lashed eyes.

He was like a boy that night, gay, brilliant, showing no shadow or sense of responsibility. He joked about their "experiment," as he called it. "I hope, Dorothy," he jested, "that you will be as gentle and obedient a ward as possible. That you will not indulge in too many lovers to plague your guardian's life out. I am afraid I shall have some trouble." He looked at her critically, approvingly, and was aghast as she jumped up from the table without warning.

"Don't!" she cried petulantly; and walking to the window, turned her back on him.

He was reminded at that moment disagreeably of the dead Lenore. He looked at the silent figure by the window, with fingers drumming nervously on the window-panes. Yes, there was the same proud carriage of the head, the same grand coronal of hair, though darker and ruddier in hue. Remembrance came like a shock, and the careless gayety of the past hour fled. His impressionable nature grew somber as if the shadow of the past had fallen and clung. He sat at the table alone, and felt no inclination to break the silence.

Just as suddenly as she had risen, she now turned and came back to him. "Forgive me. Did I startle you? I seem to have grown nervous lately, and I could not bear you to speak to me of —lovers."

She smiled straight into his eyes and put out her hand like a child seeking to make friends. He took it as he might a child's; no sense of her womanhood was his as yet.

"What a pretty soft skin you have, like a baby's!" he said, retaining her hand and smoothing it as one does velvet.

Again the crimson flooded face and throat.

"I thought you would grow up a striking-looking woman, but I did not think you would be as pretty as you are," he remarked, looking at her from an artistic standpoint.

Her woman's intuition told her how impersonal was the compliment, and robbed it of its charm.

"I am glad there is nothing of the schoolgirl about you," he went on. "I hate schoolgirls; and I have been rather fearful of the effect of these two years."

"You find me then—satisfactory?" her eyes laughed straight into his. They had a curious trick of seeking his and holding them, while they dived into the depths as if in search of something not yet discovered—not yet born.

"I am proud of my ward. I am sure Carstairs will agree with me. You and Carstairs must be friends, Dorothy. He would make an admirable husband for you, and it would save me so much trouble. I wish you would fall in love with him. He is rich, young, handsome, possessor of a title, everything, in short, a woman can desire. And you, I fancy, are just the sort of woman most men like."

She looked at him with flashing, resentful eyes. "I am not a bale of goods to go to the highest bidder," she said in angry tones, and at that moment she hated Geoffrey Carstairs.

CHAPTER V

DOROTHY was delighted with the old house on the Thames. Fairfax and she had arrived in the dusk of the twilight when the place seemed wrapped in a silence of mystery; the atmosphere was fragrant with scent of summer flowers; and as they stood for a few

moments on the steps before entering the house, she reared her head, showing the charming line of her throat; her arched, fine nostrils quivered; her figure was tense as if held in control by sheer force of will against overmastering ecstasy.

"Oh-h . . . oh-h . . . oh-h," she whispered, "it is so beautiful—so beautiful—so different from what I had pictured! I could run—I could leap—I could dance—for the mere delight of life in such a place. Is all England like this?" Her brilliant eyes and laughing lips, the mettlesome uplift of her head made her look like an incarnate joy; and Fairfax glowed with the pleasure of it.

"I am glad you are pleased," he said quietly, but his eyes spoke more warmly than his words, though he himself was hardly conscious of their emphasis.

The next morning Dorothy insisted on his playing cicerone and taking her through the house from attic to cellar. Still enjoying the novelty of the situation he complied, entering into it with a boyish gayety that surprised her.

"You will have to study up your part of guardian," she said teasingly, "otherwise you will not fill the rôle even creditably! How am I to stand in awe of you? How am I to depend upon your guidance? In short, how am I to realize that I am your ward, subject to your control? It is really very serious, monsieur!" She folded her hands, drooped her head, lowered her lids, then suddenly flashed a provoking glance from under them, laughed, and tripped lightly away from him.

Next he showed her the ponies and the smart little trap with the attendant groom, irreproachable and diminutive, for her own exclusive use.

"Cunning little beasties!" she cried, smoothing first one, then the other shining neck. Then when the groom had led them away she turned impulsively to Fairfax, with outstretched hands. "How good you are to me! How can I ever repay you?"

He took her supple, nervous hands and held them, and thought this episode of the girl's return a very pleasant one. It seemed for the moment as if he were about to bend and kiss her, but something in the strange, green eyes, the slightly parted lips, stayed him; and with a shock it came home to him that this was not the schoolgirl whose advent he had partly dreaded, partly anticipated, but a woman—young, attractive, with suggestion of slumbering passion in the eyes whose color he had only just decided on.

Morning and afternoon hours winged their way, and Fairfax had forgotten to tell Dorothy of the impending arrival of Boisey and Carstairs. About an hour before dinner he remembered his invitation. Dorothy was going up the stairs to her room, he was standing at the foot of them, still smiling from a parting flip of repartee she had flung back at him over her shoulder.

"Dorothy!" he called, and she turned, one hand resting on the balustrade, the other clasping a great cluster of heliotrope she had gathered. She lifted her eyebrows saucily, but did not speak.

"By the way," Fairfax continued, "I asked two fellows to dine with us—I was afraid you might find it dull with me alone! Make yourself your prettiest, for Carstairs is one——"

She tossed her head with contempt. "What a nuisance!" she retorted, then paused. "And—the other?" her voice drawled lazily down to him.

"The other? Oh, the other you needn't worry about. He's a dry-as-dust novelist, much too occupied with the impossible and what I consider the extremely disagreeable females he creates in his books, to pay much attention to you, Mlle. Coquette!"

Dorothy detached a spray of heliotrope from the bunch she held and flung it at him. "I might be an interesting study—guardian!" and laughing, she ran up two or three more steps.

"Oh, but—Carstairs——" he cried after her.

"Oh, but—Carstairs!" she mimicked, and disappeared down the passage to her room.

He stood in perplexity looking at the spray of heliotrope she had flung at him, which lay on the step at his feet; he stooped and picked it up. "I suppose I am a blundering idiot!" he said aloud. A ripple of laughter floated down in corroboration, and another piece of heliotrope struck him full in the face. But when he looked up there was no one in sight. The heliotrope dropped through his fingers, and he walked carelessly over the flowers, as he went out of the hall towards his study.

Had Dorothy been experienced in the ways of the world she could not have timed with greater exactitude the precise moment calculated for a satisfactory début before the two men awaiting her advent with curiosity, and, it must be added, aggrieved impatience. Fairfax had refused to answer any questions, and they had come to the conclusion that this ward of his was nothing to boast of, in the way of looks at least. Dinner was ready to serve, that they knew from a whispered communication received by their host, a few moments before; and each guest began to feel a personal grievance against this young person who could dare to infringe, even by a few minutes, on the sacred hours allotted to the evening feast. Each was growing fidgety; each glanced nervously from time to time towards the door; only Fairfax was smiling, apparently enjoying their discomfiture.

"Girls," observed Boisey sententiously, "never know the value of time—they should be trained." He looked pointedly at their host.

"You're right, old man," approved Carstairs. "Fairfax, you'll have to see to this. Wouldn't it have been wiser to have kept her at school another——" He broke off abruptly, a ludicrous change passing over his countenance.

All three men turned instinctively towards the door. Dorothy paused on the threshold, perfectly self-possessed, then came towards the group with a peculiar gliding grace of movement that neither man recalled in any other girl.

"I am late? is it so? Pardon me."

"We'll forgive you this time, Dorothy, but don't do it again. These two chaps were ready to call down anathemas on you—before they saw you!" he added maliciously. "Let me present them to you. This is Mr. Boisey, of whom you had best beware—he has an avid appetite for 'copy' and goes round seeking whom he may devour!" Dorothy acknowledged the introduction with an old-fashioned courtesy, which Boisey thought the prettiest thing he had ever witnessed.

"I am not afraid of Mr. Boisey—he does not copy, he creates, is it not so?" She looked at him in a pretty questioning way, but Fairfax interposed: "Boisey can tell you all about that afterwards. Here is Geoff hungering for his introduction and his dinner."

"Oh, I say, Fairfax," remonstrated the baronet, flushing with mortification—"what will Miss Deming think?"

"She can tell you presently," retorted Fairfax, "you are only delaying dinner by interrupting. Dorothy, allow me to present to you Sir Geoffrey Carstairs."

The young man bowed low, but Dorothy did not reward him as she had the elder man with a courtesy; she inclined her head, and after her American fashion repeated his name: "Sir Geoffrey Carstairs—I am pleased to meet you!"

"Now," said the host, "ceremonies over, let us to the dining-room. Geoff, take my ward. Boisey, you and I will bring up the rear, and con-

tent ourselves with the vision of youth and beauty in advance."

Dorothy was rather silent throughout the dinner. In a quiet way she appeared to be taking stock of the three men with whom she was thus thrown; more than once she caught Boisey's eyes scanning her quizzically, as if he read her object and was amused by it as by the whim of a child. Then he in his turn would become conscious of an answering flash from her eyes telling of pique, youthful and feminine, which made it an effort to keep the idea of amusement from formulating into a decisive lip-line of laughter. It was evident both to the novelist and his host that as for Geoff Carstairs, it was a clear "case" at first sight. Fairfax allowed himself an interlude of relief, so far as his ward's future was concerned. Such a desirable match in every way—title, wealth, youth (Carstairs was twenty-three)! Could anything have been more fortunate? He forgot that only an hour before he had been self-stigmatized "a blundering idiot."

Coffee was served on the terrace, which ran the length of the house at the back, overlooking the lawn sloping down to the river, cool with the long shadows of twilight, odorous with perfume of lime trees and flowers. No one spoke. By common consent the three men seemed content to rest in the knowledge of Dorothy's presence. She was leaning against the stone balustrade of the terrace, one slim hand playing with the trailing ivy that overgrew it; self-poised; not attempting

by any ill-timed, girlish effort to interrupt the calm of the moment, but rather entering into it, making herself a part of it, with a tact at once as rare as it was admirable. Gowned in some soft stuff of amber hue, her hair, with its magnificent reddish-copper tone, massed on the top of her finely shaped head, a great knot of scarlet geraniums at her breast, she presented a picture both vivid and vague; vivid with the physical charm of the present, vague with the possibilities dormant for the future.

Carstairs broke the silence: "Fairfax, play us something. Miss Deming, do you know that he's really a ripping fellow with the fiddle?"

"Yes—I know that he can play." The words dropped slowly from lips that suddenly appeared to lose the curve of youth, that matched eyes somber with remembrance, face white with—what? All three men looked in astonishment at the girl, at her transformation. Boisey leant forward with keen interest, the novelist's instinct aroused; Carstairs fell back against his chair as if thrown there by an unexpected blow. Fairfax alone comprehended.

Rising with his usual unhurried ease, he passed across to Dorothy, and laying his hand for an instant on hers, said, addressing them collectively, though he looked only at her: "I can not play to-night—some other time. You would prefer some other time, would you not, Dorothy?"

She let her eyes sink into his. "Yes," she mur-

mured, "some other time . . . when we are alone . . . I could not bear it now."

Boisey and Carstairs both overheard the words, saw the accompanying glance. Carstairs shivered as if with cold, and rose abruptly to take his leave. Boisey followed his example more leisurely, but he allowed himself a long, deep look into the eyes of the girl, in which he felt lay some sort of an original problem of the "eternal feminine."

"Come again," urged Fairfax. "You will always be welcome; I don't want my ward to be dull."

"Yes," laughed Dorothy, "come again, so that he—my guardian"—she mimicked Fairfax's tone—"shall not be bored."

When they had gone she turned to him abruptly, and drew him into the house. "Now," she said, "we can be ourselves—play for me . . . it has to come . . . best get it over. All these months and months—two years is it not?—I have hated the sound of the violin. It has spoken to me of death . . . her death . . . of loss. She had no love for me—my mother—make the fiddle, as your friends call it, sing to me of other things. You had power then—night after night I heard over the terrible strains her dying will evoked from your bow as if the strings spoke to her—not to you or by you. Now let them speak to me in another key . . . let me forget. . . . Give me something . . . all my own . . . to remember."

Carried away by her insistence, yielding to the

spell of the hour, he obeyed, and played to her alone—sparkling melodies, chastened here and there with a sighing suggestion of sentiment and passion, vague and delightful as the night perfumes which floated through the open window.

Silently he laid the violin away in its case; silently he followed her to the staircase in the hall; silently he took her hands. Soft as a child's breath, he felt the touch of her lips on his hand, then she was gone, and the word "Good night" floated down to him from the corridor above.

CHAPTER VI

A WEEK passed, of which three evenings found both Boisey and Carstairs at "The Willows," as Fairfax's place was called. Carstairs, on those occasions, saw apparently no one but Dorothy. He had proved a ready victim to the foreign graces of manner, the dainty coquetries of the girl. But the novelist, though not less keenly alive to her presence, was not entirely absorbed, and found time to notice with interest that the advent of himself and the baronet appeared productive of a sort of relief in their host, who invariably, a few moments after their arrival, wore the air of a man respited from duty. Derwent Boisey, accustomed to probe beneath the superficial stratum of human motive, caught himself speculating, more and more acutely, less from

the abstract—as to the possible outcome of the extraordinary position of Fairfax and his ward. He would look from one to the other: the man—the careless dilettante, vague, impressionable, indolent, always suggestive in Boisey's mind of a line of description concerning a modern French poet—"amoureux des nouvelles sensations fusent-elles dangereuses," and withal, too lacking in energy to grasp them. The girl—a slumbering volcano occasionally giving forth flashes of fire revealing a nature of tremendous capacity—for good or evil—he had not determined which, or both—but for the most part covering up the traces of exceptionality beneath an exterior as alluring as the grass-covered, sun-lighted slopes leading up to the volcano's mouth.

Those were delightful evenings the three men spent in the old house by the river, to which music lent its charm. The spell once broken, Dorothy could not have enough of the violin, and she herself astonished her hearers by an art at once inimitable and irresistible in the rendering of French chansonettes; she had a tiny voice, light as a bird's, but she managed it so cleverly that it seemed to the listeners quite the most fascinating thing they had been privileged to hear. Half speaking, half singing, with coquettish side-words, lift of eyebrow, glance of eye, she was (thought the novelist) something to fire a man's imagination, and Carstairs made no attempt to hide the effect she produced on him.

And Dorothy enjoyed it all; played with the

three men, as if she were a young sovereign holding court, dominating them with a gay imperiousness which had nothing arrogant or wounding in it, but was most engaging, most bewitching. At the beginning of the second week, Carstairs, acting on a hint from Fairfax, and received with avidity, did not wait for the evening hour to present himself at "The Willows." Morning and afternoon found him at Dorothy's side, on some pretext or the other. Dorothy did not object, was perfectly aware of his infatuation, but being possessed of an egotism that was positively superb—and herein, mark it, lay the secret of her self-possession, her gift of speech, so often a cause of wonder to the three men, she being so young—she accepted his devotion as her right, a royal prerogative. The two years in the Parisian household had ripened her into a woman of the world, and fostered the vanity which was her chiefest fault—as it had been her mother's—and completely effaced the childish simplicity with which the previous years of convent life had endowed her.

With regard to Boisey, she admitted herself baffled. Fairfax had libeled him when he dubbed him "dry-as-dust." To Dorothy he was infinitely more interesting than the young baronet, whom she read off like a book. Derwent Boisey was some fifteen years the senior of Carstairs, his dark hair already showing a few silver streaks at the temples, but a man in the prime of life, with well set-up, muscular figure, a clean-shaven, keenly intellectual face—handsome in a virile masculine

fashion far removed from the young Saxon beauty of Carstairs, or the dark, almost foreign appearance of Fairfax. Boisey was of harder, tougher fiber than the other two, and it often puzzled Dorothy, aye, and piqued her too, that she was seemingly unable to discover a vulnerable spot; unable to fire with a warmer light the eyes that watched her with the partly quizzical, partly tolerant amusement accorded to a kitten or a young child.

Her feminine annoyance reached its height when, three weeks after her installation at "The Willows," Boisey remarked on leaving: "It will be some time before I shall see you again. My publishers are exacting—I have had warning that my time is not my own. My book must be finished on or near a certain date—the limit is given. Therefore I must deny myself any outside distraction until my work is complete. Don't quite forget me, Mlle. Dorothy, and permit me to pay my devoirs when I have attained my freedom."

Dorothy pouted. "Deserter!" she cried, "it depends how long you remain away—one can not promise to remember indefinitely."

When he had departed, she turned to Sir Geoffrey, her lips tightened angrily. "He's a bear, anyway—he knows nothing of women—he has not the art of pleasing." And yet had Dorothy known, she had received the greatest compliment of her life. Derwent Boisey was running away from her—from the sense of disquiet and distraction she had brought into his life.

He could not finish his book while the girl's face, in all its infinite variety of allurements, looked up at him from the pages of the manuscript; and being a man of strong will and rectitude of purpose, he made up his mind to stick to his work until it was finished, and to do it away from the alien influence which had stolen into his life, hoping thus to regain the mastery of creative power that had failed him of late.

The summer days wore on. Tennis, boating, riding, made the hours pass with a careless joy. More and more were Carstairs and Dorothy thrown together, and more and more frequently did Fairfax absent himself. The old artist haunts were dearer to him than the house by the river. Dorothy chafed at his half-careless, half-tender tolerance of herself, which after the novelty of her presence began to wear off, evinced itself; but she was too proud to show her growing pain.

One warm afternoon—it was the middle of September—it had been early June when Dorothy had come to her English home—she, Sir Geoffrey and Fairfax were sitting in the dining-room, with its wide windows opening to the ground, the level sweep of lawn beyond. They were talking in an idle fashion born of the languorous heat of the hour, when Dorothy suddenly said: “Rodney,”—she called him so by his own request—“do you know no women but me? Am I the only one?” Her eyes flashed triumphantly but momentarily into his.

He looked up, smiling. “And are you not

enough? Can a man ask too much of the gods!" He spoke laughingly, but the girl looked at him compellingly, almost fiercely.

"Do you mean it really? do I suffice?"

But Sir Geoffrey's voice interposed before Fairfax had time to reply. "Good God, Fairfax! do you mean to condemn Dorothy" (he had long ago dropped the formal Miss Deming) "to perpetual isolation from her own sex? She ought to have some women friends. It is horrible! unnatural!" He spoke with a certain heat. He had often rebelled and chafed against the compromising position in which Fairfax's unconventional proceedings had placed the girl. She a woman, the ward of a man, young, handsome, utterly careless of all social regulations—the head of his household without the supporting presence of a chaperon! To Sir Geoffrey it was perfectly maddening; and the indifference and absolute content of the parties concerned made the question a hard one to deal with. But now his opportunity had occurred and he was determined to push it.

"Do you want to know some women, Dorothy? Are you not content?"

"I don't care for women!" she answered contemptuously. "Why should I? I want no other friend, so long as I have you—and Sir Geoffrey," she added by way of an after-thought, carelessly.

Fairfax laughed. Sir Geoffrey looked pained. It did not seem a womanly thing, this indifference to her own sex, and he hated to think of the smallest flaw in his idol.

"I thought you were too sensible a woman to pine for the one thing I can not give you—women's society," said Fairfax. "I suppose we could buy some—some ancient dame, impoverished but aristocratic, who would no doubt introduce you to 'Society,' but then, Dorothy, no more freedom, no more boating by moonlight, no more tête-à-tête rides with Carstairs, no more——"

"Stop!" cried Dorothy. "You need not go to that expense for me. I won't have it, do you hear? I won't have any women about me. I hate them, nasty, prying, meddling things! I don't want any one but you!" She spoke with a passion of gesture and expression that amused Fairfax, as if it had been the angry outburst of a child.

"There, there," he began soothingly.

Dorothy looked at him for a moment wrathfully; then a smile chased away the cloud. "I am not a baby," she said, drawing away the hand he had taken. "Sir Geoffrey,"—she turned to him abruptly,—“since we are on the subject of women, what is your ideal? You have one, I suppose. All young men have.” This with an emphasis on the young, which made Sir Geoffrey redden in spite of his twenty-three years.

"My ideal!" repeated he vaguely. He looked away, then back again to her face, and though his lips did not move, his eyes were eloquent; and they said plainly as if spoken: "You! You are my ideal, and you know it!"

Rodney, oblivious of this little byplay, let fall his contribution to the subject in his usual languid,

careless way. "It is strange how few fortunate ones are ever privileged to meet their ideal in the flesh. And yet, are they fortunate, after all? I once knew a man who wasted at least six months of his life, besides endless dollars in flowers, in the worship of a delusion. It was over there, in New York. He saw a woman one day on Fifth Avenue, a superb creature; I know, because he pointed her out to me. The carriage of a goddess, and, naturally, a figure—by Jove! how that woman carried herself!" His languid tones roused into something like temporary warmth. "Well, Blank took six months to find out who she was, followed her round like a tame spaniel—sent her flowers—but there it ended. He was in despair. He was the hardest hit fellow I ever saw. He worshipped her. At last he met her quite by chance, at a reception given by some new acquaintance way up town. And then it was all up with Blank. Poor fellow! Never saw a fellow so cut up in my life. His ideal, out of doors, with the largeness of the avenue, was something to wonder at! In a room she was *gauche*—yes, positively *gauche*. The place seemed too small for her, the four walls and the ceiling cramped her. Most women's charms are enhanced by evening dress; hers were killed. Now the question is, was Blank to be envied or pitied? He had six months' delusion before the awakening. Some people don't even have that!" He leant his head back and puffed lazily at his pipe.

"Poor devil!" Sir Geoffrey ejaculated. "We

are not all so unlucky, thank Heaven! Some ideals wear as well indoors as out!" His eyes again sought Dorothy's face, but she was looking dreamily out over the lawn down to the river. Abruptly she turned to Fairfax, and clasping her hands round her knee, leant towards him. "You," she said softly, "you have spoken glibly enough of the idea in general; suppose you tell us how it affects you personally. What is your ideal?"

Rodney removed the pipe from his lips; he too looked away to the river. "Mine?" he repeated. "I have only an outline as it were, to paint from. Every man dreams, sometimes, I suppose, I among the rest; though my dream will remain a dream. I do not even believe I ever had a desire to realize it. It is only vague and shadowy at best. She—this dream woman—must be a tall and slender thing; not a magnificent creature like our Dorothy," His eyes traveled to her and lingered caressingly, mockingly, yet coldly on her suddenly averted head, passing beyond her once more to the river, never guessing the pain that was plowing through the girl's heart at his words. "She must be ethereal like a harebell bending to the wind—not breasting it, defying it, as would our Dorothy—a willowy, lissome thing with hair the color of ripe wheat, and corn-flower eyes; of gentle gracious manner, and rare sweet smile, passionless, spirituelle——" He paused as if in pleasure at the picture he had conjured up, no sense of tightly clasped hands and suffocating heart-throbs silently endured so near him touching

him, to the disturbance of the placid beauty of his vision.

Sir Geoffrey felt a sudden most unfriendly desire to shake him into some perception of the truth. Good God! that a man so blessed could be so besottedly blind, while another would have given his life-blood for one hour of such bliss as might be his!

"And if you meet her—such things are—what would you do?" Dorothy was asking, her voice low, her head drooping.

"I should fall down and worship her," he returned promptly, half jesting, half earnest.

"Yes," broke in Sir Geoffrey, his young voice strangely stirred, "and she would smile down upon you with the inane sweetness of a stained-glass window angel, and float off into cloudland, where she properly belongs, leaving you with the comforting remembrance of what an ass you had made of yourself! Come, Dorothy," he spoke to her almost roughly, "let us get out of here, and leave him to his visions. May they satisfy him!"

Down by the river Dorothy turned and faced him, with a sort of fierce pride in her eyes and voice. "Why did you bring me here, like this? Why did you speak to him so? Was it possible you deceived yourself? Was it possible you felt sorry for me!" The mobile mouth quivered, though she held herself most proudly.

Sir Geoffrey caught her hands and held them in his strong clasp. "Oh, Dorothy, my little girl, why are you, too, so blind? Why are the purposes

of our lives doomed to cross in such perplexing fashions, when all might be so simple, so straight?"

She snatched her hands from his grasp, and faced him with angry eyes. "How dare you touch me!" she cried.

A quiver of pain passed over Sir Geoffrey's face, but he spoke no word, though her next words cut him like a lash, as she flung them at him, as if she could not send them from her swiftly enough. "I hate you! I never want to see you again!"

She turned and fled from him into the house, rushing like a whirlwind up the short flight of stairs to her room. Then, the door safely locked against intrusion, she stood, panting, against the open window, her supple hands clenched, her face dyed a burning red. "If I could but go away! If God would but let me die! but I am so strong, so vulgarly healthy—never an ache, never a pain!" She struck her hands almost fiercely against her young round breasts. Twice she walked the length of the room, then halted before a mirror, which, reaching to the ground, revealed the length of her form, from the russet-crowned head to the daintily shod feet. "'Not a magnificent creature like our Dorothy,' he said, 'but a willowy, slender thing, like a harebell bending to the wind.' Bah!" she cried out in angry wounded vanity, "a simpleton! A white-blooded creature, barren of ideas—not a flesh and blood woman like you! I too am tall and slender, and supple! How dare he call me 'magnificent,' as if in mockery! There

is *life* in you!" And she leant forward suddenly and kissed her own reflection on the lips, then, moving away, burst into a wild fit of weeping.

"I will go away—I must—I will not stay—Perhaps even——" Her thoughts, all uncontrolled now in her hysterical passion, turned for a moment towards Sir Geoffrey, only to be withdrawn, with a shuddering writhe of repugnance, as she lifted her tear-stained face upwards and outwards from her window to the clear, calm sky, as if taking it to witness of her words. "No, Sir Geoffrey, it can not be. His wife! when the very touch of his hand makes me creep coldly, the look in his eyes fills me with loathing! Oh, Rodney, Rodney! why are you so cruel, so blind?" And then, right there, unsummoned, unwished for, rose up before her, a full vision of that terrible death-bed, when she, who had given her existence, had also voiced her agony, had suffered the same pangs, the same rending of her woman's heart. It was horrible! Mother and daughter both fallen under the same curse; the blow dealt to both from the self-same hand; and the bitterness of remembrance was intensified in the heart of the latter by the thought, that to that hand she owed all the good of her young life—even the very clothes she wore!

"And I—then, in my ignorance blamed her!" cried the girl aloud. "God forgive me; I did not know!—I must go away. It will kill me here—I can not stay.

But her words were empty passion. She did not go. When the morrow came she still was

there. "Just a few hours' respite. To-morrow I will surely go," she told herself excusingly. But many morrows came and went, and still she lingered, and soon the thought died a natural death; for as day swept after day, and two weeks had passed, the more fully did her life merge into his, until his very presence came to be life itself to her; his smile, her sunlight; the kindness of his eyes, the moon and stars of her heaven.

A morbid, unwholesome condition, dimming even the radiance of her perfect health; a feverish glitter replaced the former steady light of her strange green eyes; an alternating restlessness and languor holding sway over the erstwhile strong and supple body.

Sir Geoffrey saw it all, but he was powerless, tied hand and foot by his own hopeless love, and his bitter pain; for now he knew to a certainty that the prize was not to him, and alas! unknown, unvalued by him whose glory it should have been. And Derwent Boisey was grinding away at the last chapters of his book, fiercely keeping himself strung up to a key of high-pressure work; shutting the door firmly in working hours on the temptation of cool evenings by the quietly flowing river; of gay chansons in a birdlike voice; of mutinous eyes and laughing lips; the pleasant society of the two men friends; the soothing smoke in the odorous summer air. The weather in Town was execrable; the atmosphere heavy with moisture, enervating, depressing; and it was not without a struggle that the novelist kept to his guns.

CHAPTER VII

DURING the idle summer days which had passed, an idea had been germinating in Fairfax's mind, and it had now in mid-autumn come to fruition; an idea apart from Dorothy, one in which she could not share. He had seen with intense satisfaction Sir Geoffrey's growing attachment, and although a little puzzled by Dorothy's changeable moods, had put them down to "feminine wiles and coquetries," aware of his own ignorance on the subject of woman. He was only waiting to put his own plans in motion, for Sir Geoffrey to declare himself. The old roving, restless spirit had broken out upon him, the desire for movement, new scenes and inspiration, and he had made all arrangements for a protracted tour in the East, but as yet had spoken no word of it to Dorothy and Carstairs. Seeing that matters moved so slowly, he became impatient, and on one of the last days of September he determined to speak to Sir Geoffrey.

Accordingly, when an opportunity that afternoon occurred, he seized it. His vexation and astonishment was almost ludicrous, when Sir Geoffrey firmly but sadly told him he had no intention of pressing his suit. "Why should I add to her pain?" he said, with a loyal self-denial that struck Fairfax with admiration.

"Add to her pain?" he repeated. "What pain? What do you mean?"

Sir Geoffrey looked at him for a moment in silence, then burst into a short harsh laugh. "What blind fools some men are! Is it possible, Fairfax, you do not guess? You are breaking the girl's heart! If I loved her less, I would not open your eyes, but I can bear my own pain if I can but see her happy. She is miserable, I tell you, Rodney! What are all your plans for her happiness, all your gifts, if you withhold the chiefest, the only one she values!"

Bravely said, Sir Geoffrey! but the effort was a mighty one. Fairfax's face paled, and he staggered unsteadily for a moment.

"Is this thing true, Carstairs? For God's sake, say you're only jesting. It is too horrible. You do not—you can not guess!"

Sir Geoffrey's face blanched then. "What do you mean? Why should it be horrible? I think you're the most blessed man on earth. Would God I could say it were only a jest! I would give half my life for one hour of the joy that might be yours for all the days of your life!"

Fairfax recovered himself with an effort. "I always thought she must care for you, Carstairs. It has been my greatest wish since she came here. You seemed so suited to each other. Are you sure you're not mistaken?" There was a positive eagerness for relief in his tone.

"There can be no mistake. A man who loves a woman as I love her can not be mistaken. I have been a weak fool to linger so long, but she was so alone here. See here, Fairfax, you have taken a

great responsibility on yourself. It has always seemed an odd thing to me how you—so young a man—came to have a ward of Dorothy's age. Your age is of course a safeguard against one scandal, but it is provocative of another! You give her everything money can buy, but she is a woman; she wants more than that. If you neglect her, don't you see what temptations you put in her way, so young, so headstrong, so pretty? Good God, man! are you so blind? You dare not, I tell you you must not, leave her to herself. She has no woman friend to guide her, no one but you to look to. I wonder how you *dared* take such a trust upon yourself!"

He had lashed himself to a strong pitch of excitement, and he walked backwards and forwards in the library where the interview was taking place, his hands clenched, his eyes flashing.

Fairfax felt thoroughly upset by the discovery thrust upon him. He lived over again in succeeding moments of silence, the painful death-scene of Lenore, the mother. And now the same evil had befallen the child. Why had it come upon these two women—why was he so powerless to feel—to respond? He felt, at the moment, that he would have yielded all his fortune, could he have gone to Dorothy Deming with love in his heart and love on his lips. He looked at Carstairs, so splendid a type of young manhood, so loyal, so brave. Why could she not have loved him? he thought resentfully. What a hideous jumble this world is!

"I'm going," said Sir Geoffrey abruptly. "Say good-bye—to her—for me. I shall go away for a time—somewhere—anywhere. Take care of her, Fairfax. Good-bye, old fellow." With a hasty shake of the hand, the baronet left the room, and rushed out of the house without one backward look.

Fairfax did not see Dorothy again until dinner. He eyed her from time to time furtively. She was in a particularly gay and brilliant mood; and Fairfax felt a sudden sense of relief. There could be no truth in Sir Geoffrey's tale, else how could she meet his glance with such unclouded gaze? He thought he would try her.

"Sir Geoffrey is going away for a time," he remarked abruptly.

Her eyes met his unmoved. "Indeed! I shall miss him—but"—she leant nearer to him, and her eyes flashed audaciously, temptingly, full upon his—"I shall not mind if it makes you desire to relieve my loneliness."

The challenge in her gaze, not bold, not unwomanly, but most alluring, staggered him. He moved uneasily in his seat. "Of course," he said weakly. "I will do what I can. But," more hopefully, "he won't be able to stay away long. You know that, Dorothy, wicked siren that you are! You have bewitched the poor fellow."

"Yes!" she answered calmly. "It's a nuisance, of course. He was so nice until he turned lover." She paused and shrugged her shoulders with a little Frenchy affectation that amused him.

"Dorothy," he said impulsively, "how did you contrive to drop your childhood so completely in those two years? I left you a raw schoolgirl—I find you a woman."

She smiled; rather sadly, it seemed to him. "I do not know. I thought so much in those two long years; I studied, I read—and then—her death—I was never a child after that. It opened my eyes to so much; and afterwards, when I was able to think, I understood it all." She pushed back her chair impatiently, and rose from the table. "Come and play to me," she said, and went swiftly to a small room opening on the conservatory, their favorite haunt. She reached his violin case down from its resting-place, and opening it, handed the instrument to him without a word. She wandered into the conservatory and plucked a spray of stephanotis, which she fastened in her bosom; then, as the strains of the violin came stealing forth, she went back into the room, and seated herself where she, herself in shadow, could watch the player's face unrebuked.

He played on for more than an hour, weird, fantastic melodies, that filled the girl's heart with an aching physical pain; a terror of she knew not what.

He finished abruptly, and laid the violin away in its case; then, without a word to her, he stepped out into the moonlight. The thought of his intended tour was strong in its hold upon him. It had inspired the harmonies he had just hushed. The somber beauty of vast forests, sunless, track-

less, noiseless in their imperturbable shadow, seemed stretching before him; his artist soul precipitated itself therein, meandering with panther-like tread, in a maze of Indian jungle, its immensity of silence broken only by the stealthy footfall of the supple-bodied jaguar! Weird shapes, strange perfumes lent their aid to his fantastic reverie, and he longed for fulfilment of the ecstasy his dream foreshadowed.

He became aware, by a kind of slow awakening, of the near presence of Dorothy. She had been standing by him for some moments before either spoke. How was he to tell her of this journey of his? And yet, how could he give it up? Why should he? She would be well cared for; he would see to that. Surely it was best that he should go, selfishness argued, masquerading as loyalty to her. It was only natural, he reminded himself sharply, that he should find it an ungrateful task to tell her something which he knew would give her pain.

"Dorothy," he began, turning to her, and taking one of her hands with a careless tenderness that hurt her more cruelly than would have utter indifference, "Dorothy"—he repeated her name as if to gain time; he found this thing harder in the telling than he had bargained for, and she would not help him by so much as a word or a look. He felt a passing anger towards her. Why could she not divine his pain, and save him the labor of words necessary for the birth of the unpleasant truth? He dropped her hand, and partly turned

from her as he plunged desperately into his subject. "I am going away, Dorothy, for some time. I think of making an extended tour, one I have long contemplated, India, Persia, Arabia, the Holy Land—"

He paused, and something constrained him to look at her, but her face was in shadow; only a vague outline, revealing nothing, was visible.

Her voice, a trifle strained, came to him across the silence. "When do you wish me to be ready?"

He almost staggered backwards. He dreaded the effect of his next words. And yet they must be spoken. "You mistake me, dear. This is no lady's journey. You——"

But she broke in upon his speech unceremoniously, moving nearer to him: "You are not going without me? You are not going to leave me behind?"

"Dorothy, you are so impulsive, otherwise you you must see that it is impossible for you to accompany me!"

She stepped back from him and pressed her hand tightly to her bosom.

"And if I refuse to be left?"

The moonlight fell full upon her. It showed the tall figure with its rounded though slender proportions, the swelling bust, the small head with its auburn-hued coronal so exquisitely set on the long, firm throat, the deep, wide eyes, the full mouth, the supple hands, the warm white flesh; and seeing her thus with her passionate plea fresh in his ears, Fairfax's artistic perception opened fully to her

beauty. He recognized it as never before. A warmer light came in his eyes, his heart stirred faintly, the magic of their environment fell upon him. He put out his hand authoritatively: "Stay!" he cried, "just as you are! Do not move! You are superb! Divine!"

She looked at him in bewildered silence for a moment; then her woman's heart rebelled and cried out at the cruelty of his admiration. It was that of the artist, not of the man.

She moved towards him, disregarding his restraining gesture, which seemed to say that not half enough had his soul drunk in of its revelation; and having gained his side, she laid her hand within his arm and drew him swiftly towards the river. There it swept, broad and placid in the moonlight.

"Look at it!" she cried, her voice vibrant with some strange new passion, the warm clasp of her hand strong upon his arm: "See how silent, how promiseful of rest it lies! What secrets are locked in its breast until it empties them into the wide-stretching arms of the sea! Secrets, which you, with your artist's soul would give your being to possess, secrets which I will strive to fathom if you leave me here alone!" She was conscious of his startled movement, but she went on, hurried along on the tide of passion that was seething within her breast: "If you go away to the Far East leaving me here, with none but the river and the trees and my own sad thoughts for companionship, I shall go mad, or die! Think of it! Picture

my loneliness! How dare you condemn a girl of eighteen to such a life? Have you no heart? Are you man at all? or only a piece of mechanism, responsive alone to 'impressions,' imbued with 'artistic perception' in lieu of life and blood. 'Come with me and I will care for you,' you said. Is this your care? You will be away for months, perhaps for years! it may be you will never return! And you think I can bear it!"

She would have broken from him with outstretched arms towards the river, but he caught her and held her fast; and suddenly from out the gloom of a cluster of trees on the opposite bank rose up the nightingale's sad song. The spirit of night seemed to have flung an enchantment over the scene, and Fairfax felt steeped in its fairness. Tardily but surely he responded to the witchery of the hour. Gently he drew the girl's form within his embrace; he pushed back the thick waves of hair, and looked deep into the shining eyes.

"Come with me, since you will it so!" he murmured, and stooping, kissed her.

CHAPTER VIII

THE long hours of the night, during half of which Dorothy tramped her room in a delirium of joy too excessive for rest, passed very differently and far more slowly with Fairfax. Annoyed at having yielded to a temporary spasm of passion, he felt himself

caught in a net from which there was no escape. He told himself he did not love her, although the recollection of that kiss was a pleasant one, and he thrilled at the memory of the sweet burden of her form within his arms. But he doubted his capacity to love. Passion had touched him but lightly and infrequently, and love, never.

"It's all a cursed nuisance!" he muttered to himself, whilst at his toilet in the morning. "Why couldn't she have cared for Carstairs?"

And alas! for Dorothy, why could she not? What evil destiny had thrown its spell upon her that she was then, and always, blind to the nobility of the one and to the supreme selfishness of the other; blind with a blindness that made the dark Southern face and lithe limbs of the one the very light of her life, nay, life itself, while the other, once removed from her presence, ceased to have existence in her mind.

All that night she had, with hands tight clasped across her breast, softly murmured, "He loves me!" but so often that almost it seemed she doubted and sought by force of reiteration to convince herself.

She went forward joyously to meet him at the breakfast table. She would not see his embarrassment, and yet it was as if he did not know in what new fashion to greet her. She gave him both her hands, and her face was radiant.

"Rodney," she whispered, without waiting for him to speak, "I am so happy, so proud!" And she bent her head swiftly, and kissed his hands.

She was very fair in her joy, and he took her in his arms impulsively and kissed her.

It was pleasing to his vanity to have this devotion showered upon him. The artistic, sensuous element in his temperament accepted the sensation as agreeable, and after all, since she was happy—how better could he fulfill his responsibility? It was not his fault that he could not give her more, and since she was content— All that morning he was companioned by twin thoughts, allied yet opposed, one of regret, one of sensuous content.

She had shadowed him with sweet persistency in the morning hours, and he had basked in the warm sunlight of her radiant eyes; but when in the afternoon the heavens clouded over, and hurrying, storm-laden clouds drove over the erstwhile serene sky, he felt impelled to the necessity of motion. He made some trivial excuse and left her, and with his long supple stride he walked on and on by the river's dull gray flow.

His tour, that had filled his thought yesterday, whence had its prospective pleasure gone and vanished, like a leaf wind-driven from its tree? He shuddered as he thought of the somber forest depths his poet's fancy had conjured up, broken by the dissonance of a woman's voice. No, the dream was ended, never to return.

When would she wish to be married? It must not be too long. Tardily the responsibility of her fair name came to him. The world's eyes are keen, and a babe could read the transparent story

of her face! He shivered, as if the chill air had struck him physically, and yet there were drops of perspiration on his forehead. Away from the passionate spell of her presence he had nothing but a sense of weariness, desolation.

It was dusk when he returned. The light in the hall dazzled him as he entered, so that when Dorothy met him, he blinked his eyes as if blinded, as he met the passionate, uplifted glance of hers.

"At last!" The words were breathed rather than spoken. "And I have so much to say to you!"

Then he perceived that there were dark rings round her eyes—which shone with a fever-light of brilliance.

It was after dinner that she unburdened herself. "Rodney," she hesitated, and her pale cheeks dyed themselves suddenly with burning blushes which lingered; "since last night, since I know that you do care"—was it fancy, or did the last sentence bear the faint flavor of interrogation?—"I have been thinking, oh, so long and deeply and bitterly, that the best proof I can give you of my love is to let you go; to await you here." Her eyes were downcast, and her hands played nervously one with the other, so she was spared the sudden gleam which flashed across the man's face; and it was quickly controlled.

Her voice was strangely shaken, as she went on hurriedly: "I want to give you some proof, to make you feel my truth. And surely sacrifice is the greatest. It will be death to me—I shall not

live—while you are away—but when you come back you will give me new life—for you are my life. Oh, Rodney, will you ever know what you are to me? Am I unwomanly? Do you despise me? But I love you so—I love you so!”

She had flung herself down on her knees beside his chair, and bent her proud head down on his clasped hands. A terrible humility seized him. His voice was broken and aged. He passed his hands tenderly and reverently over the glorious coils of hair. “Oh, Dorothy, my little one, would to God you loved me less! I am not worthy!”

She raised her tear-stained face, as he wound her arms around his throat. “You are my king, my beloved, my all-worthy——”

A week later she was alone—for twenty-four hours after his departure she shut herself in her room, and resolutely refused all food and drink, save the cold spring water which she herself had placed at hand.

It had been a glorious autumnal day with an air softly reminiscent of summer when she had bidden him “Good-bye” on the great ocean palace, which she hated like a living thing for bearing him away. It was another face that nature showed, when at length she emerged from her solitude, water-proofed and eager to face the stormy elements of driving rain and chill autumnal wind. The house-keeper eyed her aghast as she met her stealing like a ghost, hollow-eyed and haggard, across the hall.

"Surely, miss, you won't venture forth such weather, and you with an empty stomach, too. I am sure Mr. Fairfax——"

A quick, forbidding gesture, an imperious flash from the over-bright eyes, and Dorothy was gone. The worthy housekeeper, bewildered and shocked, went back to the servants' hall to recount her tale. "It all comes of these outlandish foreign notions of hers!" She sniffed her disapproval, chorused by the others.

Meanwhile out in the rain the slender water-proofed figure sped on, unconscious of everything save the need to fight out the desolation that was in her by physical struggle with something tangible. She delighted in the heavy rain driving so fiercely on her uncovered face; in the wind that swept round her, as if it would bear her off in its rough embrace, away over the turgid river whose waters were being lashed under its whip into angry wavelets. She had walked a couple of miles before her mind opened to outraged Nature's cry; then, faint from hunger and want of rest, she staggered and would have fallen, had not a strong arm been outstretched to save her.

One glance from startled and ungracious eyes, then controlling herself by a supreme effort, she withdrew herself from his supporting clasp. "You here! I thought you had gone away!"

"I could not, Dorothy," Sir Geoffrey answered. "I had gone—yes—as far as Town, then I heard that he was going—knew that you would be left alone—and I could not stay away. You may need

me—how can one tell? Nay, do not fear”—seeing her swift movement of repulse, his young face hardening in proud negation,—“I shall not bore you with my presence, but I shall be here—in case you want me. I have been to the house. I knew how you were suffering and I saw you come out, and I could not let you go alone. And now I am going to take you back. You can not deny me the privilege that any stranger might claim who had helped you in your need——”

With masterful yet tender emphasis he took her hand and placed it within his arm, and half led, half carried her back to the house.

“Put her to bed and see that every care is taken. She is chilled through and through. I shall send a doctor at once,” he said to the housekeeper.

For three weeks Dorothy kept her room, with a feverish chill, and it was nearly a month before Sir Geoffrey was admitted to her presence.

It was a very humbled and lovely little face that greeted him. “My dear child, how ill you look!” he exclaimed, shocked at her altered appearance; the next moment ready to bite out his tongue for giving vent to his feelings.

A wan, self-pitiful smile crept round the sad mouth. “Do I look so very—ugly? Then I am glad Rodney is not here to see.”

Sir Geoffrey winced. Was it possible there could be a flaw in his idol! It was not the first time his nerves had quivered under some transparent, yet momentary, revelation of his lady’s magnificent egotism. What was he in her eyes but a trib-

ute to her prerogative of conquest? What right had he to expect to be more? He rallied with an effort. "We shall soon have you well, and every phase becomes you!" he added gallantly.

She rose to the proffered sop to vanity, and gazed upon him kindly. Her hands had been tight clasped over something on her dress; they were parted now and revealed the outlines of a letter. "Fairfax?" he queried.

A happy light danced in her eyes, and she smiled with a certain childish glee. Rodney had found it easier to write than to speak, and he had written with the flush of their passionate parting still warm in his memory.

"Come," she said later, "let us go down to the river."

Together they strolled there, and unmooring the boat they rowed lazily out upon its waters. There was a soft gray haze over the landscape, the air was still and somewhat damp. Sir Geoffrey had no wish to talk, and Dorothy was enwrapped in a sensuous glow of delight which the contact of her letter brought with it, as it rested within her bodice against her warm flesh. They drifted onwards, and Dorothy trailed her right hand through the cold waters; such slim, pretty fingers, Sir Geoffrey thought wistfully; then pulled himself together with a start.

"Dorothy," he said impetuously, breaking in on her happy reverie and bringing a frown to her face, "it seems to me that you will be horribly lonely in that old house all by yourself!"

"Lonely!" she broke in unceremoniously. "Yes. But how much less so there, where I have memories of him to fill every corner of the house, than I should be, surrounded by a crowd of people elsewhere, where no solitary spot could speak to me of him!"

He winced, but persevered. "That may be, but have you thought how it will appear to the world?"

"The world!" she interrupted scornfully. "What have the world and I to say to each other? *He* is my world! As long as he is content, I need have no care!"

Again the rapt look crept into her eyes. Sir Geoffrey was silent. He was too loyal to deceive her, to awaken her to the selfishness of her idol, who had no thought in this for her, no cognizance of any deeper need than the mere material necessities and luxuries of life, for all of which he had left her amply dowered. Gradually and slowly, however, a deep resentment was growing up in his heart against his quondam friend for his inability to appreciate the responsibility he had taken upon himself, and which he carried so lightly.

In silence they rowed back; then, Sir Geoffrey having moored the boat, they walked across the lawn to the house. Dorothy's expression had wholly changed in the last half-hour, and was now gloomy and morose. She did not invite him to enter, and bade him good-bye almost curtly, not

once looking back, though he stood and watched her until the door closed upon her.

"It's all damnably wrong!" he sighed as he left the grounds, "but what can a fellow do? If I were a woman, now, I might see some way to help her; but then most likely, I mightn't want to serve her so awfully. Poor little girl! so undisciplined to trouble, so blindly infatuated! How will it end? If only he loved her! God! what chances some men have, and yet are blind! There doesn't seem to be much justice in it all!" And he trudged along, his bright young manhood clouded over by its encounter with the perplexities of life.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR GEOFFREY did not see Dorothy for the next three days; but in that period he had not been idle. The result of some hard thinking had brought about an effect which afforded him considerable satisfaction. When at length he presented himself before her, she felt a vague surprise at the contented expression he wore. She was in a gay and responsive mood as it happened, and rallied him at once on his absence.

"Truant!" she cried. "How could you have the heart to desert a maiden all forlorn for such an eternity? Have you an idea, sir, of the horrible surfeit I have had of my own society? And

however much it bores one, one can't get rid of it, you know! Three days of gray shadow, and at last the sun deigns to shine!" She made a pretty and unconsciously dramatic gesture of gratitude towards him. She was quite bewildering in this new guise.

What a creature of moods she was, thought Sir Geoffrey, so un-English with her half-foreign graces of movement, her restlessness which, however, was never awkward, only odd and stimulating.

"I really believe you are glad to see me, Dorothy!" he said quickly, his handsome face alight with pleasure.

"Glad! Of course I am! I should have welcomed anything that walked on two legs. I want to get away from myself for a while. Don't you ever suffer from ennui? But no! you are too well ordered in the matter of nerves, too stolidly English!" She made a little *moue* at him, her laughing eyes resting on his face.

"If I don't suffer from nerves, I suffer from something much worse, something I can't parade lightly, and which hurts all the more. So be kind to me, Dorothy, and give me gentle words sometimes."

Dorothy's face hardened, and a little cruel smile curved her lips.

"What can you, a man, know of suffering? It is only a mood, a whim! You have a hundred distractions! But I—I suffer, suffer, suffer, every hour and moment of time! It is hideous! I

can't get away from it. There is nothing I can do to drown the pain of remembrance, and the dread——" She pulled herself up abruptly, as if on the edge of a precipice, and glanced covertly at Sir Geoffrey, to see if he had noticed whither her impetuous temper had well-nigh led her.

But his face betrayed no sign; it only looked older, grayer, bereft of the content that had been in it a while before. And yet her words had revealed something to him, and he found himself wondering whether her dread had reference to a possible forgetfulness on Rodney's part.

"Poor little girl!" he said soothingly. "I know you suffer; but you must brace up and meet the pain, Dorothy, meet it again and again, until you weaken and conquer it!" He paused aghast at the fire that flashed in her eyes.

"And so you counsel me to forget! Listen!" She came nearer to him, and he saw the heaving of her chest, felt the sudden grasp of her fingers on his arm; "I should hate myself if I even thought it possible the pain could grow less. I did not mean what I said just now, that it was hideous, and that I wanted to get away from it. No! that was blasphemy against my love. You, you cold, self-masterful man, nurtured in the chills and fogs of this dreary climate, what do you know of love? love like mine, that is a fever in my veins, that gives me no peace nor day nor night, and yet which is life to me! bereft of whose mingled anguish and joy, existence itself would end! I see him always, know him near me. I feel in the silent

hours of the night I can bring him to me, that his spirit answers the call of mine; then exhaustion seizes me, and there are times when I feel that I am dying, that never again shall we be together on this earth; and then it seems that the whole world is blotted out, and there is nothing but a vast blackness that appalls me." Suddenly her expression changed; a light, bitter laugh escaped her; her hold upon his arm relaxed; the fire which had lightened her eyes into somber magnificence flared out and left them dead and hard. "You think me mad! You are saying to yourself, never have I known any girl talk in this unmaidenly fashion. It is, perhaps, her American parentage and her French veneer of education that is at fault. I must make excuse. She is half barbarian—have I not divined rightly, *mon ami*?"

She laughed again, as she saw how true had been her surmise. And Sir Geoffrey, mad with himself that he had allowed what, in his humility, he thought of as his insular prejudices, to master him to the extent of betraying their existence on his countenance, at the same time appalled at the depth of the passion betrayed to him, hardly knew what to reply. True it was he had never met any woman fashioned after the likeness of Dorothy. Bright, clever, and sometimes original girls he had met in society, but the cleverness and originality had in all cases been subdued by the conventionalities imposed on well-bred, unmarried women. But never one like Dorothy! He experienced almost a revulsion of feeling towards

her for the moment. It seemed to him (high treason though he felt it) that her own words had clothed his feeling in expression. Unmaidenly! He felt quite certain that none of the girls he had met could feel with such tragic intensity; and that if that unfortunate experience were theirs they would have died with the secret unrevealed. Then he looked once more upon the face that he loved, and all blame and reproach were swallowed up and lost in the great tenderness that filled him towards her, making him long to enwrap her in its folds, and save her from all future pain and sorrow.

“It is not your fault that you hurt me so cruelly, Dorothy. You do not mean it, do you, dear? It is simply that you do not understand. I want to help you, in all truth, for I know you are lonely; how lonely, little one, you do not seem to fathom. You must try, and with that wondrous imagination of yours the task will not be hard—you must try and look upon me as some old foggy of a friend, a fossil, if you will, who has outgrown suffering, susceptibility and kindred masculine follies, and feel only that I am your friend, ready and eager to do your bidding. God knows, Dorothy, I would gladly take all your suffering now and henceforth, and hide myself remote from your eyes, and bear it so you could be exempt!”

Dorothy was touched; his sincerity was so evident. With that astonishing power of immediately and completely passing from one mood to another, she threw off the somber shadow of in-

tensity, and emerged gracious, almost childlike. "How very sweet and dear your patience with me is, Sir Geoffrey!" She stretched out both her hands to him, and for a moment laid them lightly in his clasp. After all, since Rodney was away, it was pleasant to feel this big, noble-hearted man was ready at her service; she was in truth his sovereign lady; he, her vassal to command.

"I have thought incessantly about you during these three days of absence," he went on, rather more hurriedly, as one not sure of his ground; "and it seemed to me so sad a thing—I realize it as you never have—that you, a woman, so young, so pretty, here all alone, with not a woman friend——" He saw her face changing. The sweet graciousness was dying out, and a weary, uninterested expression creeping over it; his heart sank, but he persevered: "And so, Dorothy, don't be angry with me, I spoke to a dear friend of mine, and she seemed to understand it all; and she begs permission to come and see you, and to bring her daughters, girls of your own age, with her. I am sure you will like them, they are charming people."

"I hate charming people!" retorted Dorothy, with deep resentment in her voice, "and I think you are very tiresome, Sir Geoffrey! I take back all the nice compliments I paid you just now. The only thing you can do to redeem them is to keep these charming people from coming here. It would only be a waste of time; and I regret to

appear uncivil, but I don't want to see them. I know I should hate them. That is human nature, you know—one always hates what one ought to love, and one always loves that which one should hold in abhorrence,”

“Oh, Dorothy!” ejaculated Sir Geoffrey; but she saw that he was deeply pained. And the knowledge that she recognized this and was sorry for it, added to her irritation.

“Why could you not let me be?” she said pettishly. “I warn you that I will go on my own way. Nothing that you can do or say will influence me in the slightest. It seems to me a pity that you should waste your efforts in trying to devise means for the improvement of a person who does not want to be improved!”

Sir Geoffrey said nothing. The reception his good intention met with wounded him deeply. He had taken a great deal of trouble, and used an immense amount of tact in bringing about a receptive attitude in Mrs. Baldwin's mind. She had not taken altogether kindly to his suggestion at first.

Her very words returned to him: “My dear Sir Geoffrey, are you not a little unreasonable? If I did not know your family to be beyond reproach in the matter of sanity, I might be tempted to put it even more strongly. You know how numerous our engagements are, and I am not in the habit usually of seeking out people. I generally find it difficult enough to look after those who seek me out! And then, this young woman from

your own account is evidently a little—er—odd, and I am afraid she and the girls will not prove congenial; and altogether, Sir Geoffrey, don't you think——”

But Sir Geoffrey's persuasive powers had, in the end, proved too strong; for his old friend had a very warm corner in her heart for the young baronet. She thought of her eldest daughter Violet, and all at once it seemed to her that it was imperative that she should ascertain what manner of young woman this Dorothy Deming might be. Better a foe face to face than one in ambush. Unseen difficulties are so apt to be exaggerated by imagination.

And now having secured his point at one end, Sir Geoffrey found himself baffled at the other.

Dorothy was looking at him with unfriendly eyes, but would say no word to help him. Still they sat there, speechless, angry. Dorothy covertly watched Sir Geoffrey, who, although conscious of her furtive glance, would not allow his eye to meet hers. Gradually a smile crept round the corners of her mouth and lighted her eyes, but she did not break the silence. Then, without warning, she sprang up from her seat and faced round on him. She stretched out both her hands, and, seizing his unwilling ones, tried with all her strength to pull him up towards her.

“Cross still?” she pouted. “Oh, what a spoilt child! It couldn't bear to have its little scheme so rudely knocked on the head! I'm sorry, Sir Geoffrey. I was bad to you, and I apologize.

Bring your 'charming people' down if you must, but if things don't turn out as you wish, why you can't help it, can you? and you can't say I have not warned you. What! not forgiven yet? Oh, fie! Sir Geoffrey! What a temper! You must not indulge in it. It may become a terrible menace to you. Ah! a wee, wan smile at last. You forgive me?"

"Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy!" he cried, laughing in spite of himself, and springing up beside her, "what a child you are in some ways! One feels that, after getting angry with the *woman*, as one thought. What a strange mixture you are! Is that your charm? What is it that makes you different from all other women?"

"It doesn't matter, does it? One does not need to analyze that which gives one pleasure; that is pain's prerogative." She laughed at him gleefully, like a child pardoned for some misdoing.

And yet, when an hour later he left her, Sir Geoffrey trembled, for, with all her return to sweet and gracious mood, there was a suggestion of devilry in the emphasis with which she called out to him at parting: "Bring your charming people to-morrow by all means. I shall look forward to the visit. I am sure it will be immensely interesting; and you shall see, Sir Geoffrey, how beautifully I can behave. Oh, I promise you it will be a success."

But to Sir Geoffrey it appeared suddenly possible to look at a thing from more than one given point of view. What would Dorothy's viewpoint be?

CHAPTER IX

OF course, my dears, it is altogether a most very reluctant to make the acquaintance, extraordinary situation. And I felt but Sir Geoffrey is such a dear fellow! Then, too, one may be allowed a little curiosity, you know; and after all, the girl is engaged to be married, and to a very rich man. I have heard of him, Rodney Fairfax—he is quite an oddity also. Altogether, you see, I couldn't be churlish, and if we don't like her, if we find she is impossible, well then we need not stimulate our memories!" Mrs. Baldwin looked at Violet, who was seated by her side, and then across to Lillian, who occupied the front seat of the landau, as they were driven rapidly on towards Twickenham.

Violet smiled acquiescence; Lillian looked calmly uninterested. They were pretty girls. "Charming manners, as far as they go!" men said, in speaking of Violet. Of Lillian they said nothing. Decidedly the question often arose, were there possibilities in Violet, or were there not? Would her life flow on in placid sunlight, shadowed only by occasional clouds of commonplace vexations, or would the keynote be struck some day to attune the instrument to finer harmonies, subtler shades of meaning, bringing it within touch of the somber side-lights of life, sorrow, suffering, sin? Would the fine intelligence, at present only half awakened to its possibilities,



break through the stiff hedgerows of conventionality, and find its outlet, or would it rest content?

As the carriage stopped in front of the queer, old-fashioned door, sunk, as it were, into the high wall which screened the grounds of Fairfax's place from off the highway, Mrs. Baldwin spied Sir Geoffrey drawing near from the opposite direction.

"Well met, Sir Geoffrey!" she cried warmly, as she gave him her hand, while a delicate, pure color leapt up in Violet's cheeks as her eyes rested on the young man. "It will be charming to have you to introduce us—although, of course, we quite counted on that—only sometimes, you know, there are little contretemps as to time and so on——"

Sir Geoffrey, as he shook hands with Violet and Lillian, could only hope that no greater contretemps would occur. He feared that Dorothy, with her taste for dramatic effect, would do something *outré*. But as they entered the drawing-room, and Dorothy came forward to greet them, he found all his fears allayed in a wave of gratitude and pleasure. Her manner was perfect. He could see that Mrs. Baldwin was both impressed and astonished. This graceful young hostess, with her French charm of conversation, her admirable self-possession, her tact, was a being entirely different from the eccentric young woman Sir Geoffrey had unconsciously led her to expect. Mrs. Baldwin found herself confronted by no problem difficult of solution. She could perfectly

understand and manage a girl of this type, she told herself. What did Sir Geoffrey mean by leading her to expect something so entirely different? It did not occur to her that Dorothy was simply playing a part; that while she, the elder, was skimming along the surface so contentedly, the younger woman was quietly probing the depths, and finding out, to her inward amusement and satisfaction, many little weaknesses and intentions, whereof the other was unconscious of revelation.

Dorothy's first impression of Violet Baldwin was of the quiet, high-bred face and manner, so entirely different to her own airy grace. Later, a clearer picture of this new acquaintance photographed itself on her mind. She saw a girl of perhaps nineteen or twenty, of medium height, with slender, rounded figure, delicate features, light-brown hair, blue-gray eyes and complexion of singular purity of tint. The eyes puzzled her—they were so serene, so steady—and Dorothy wondered if they could ever be made to flare up with passion's fierce light, or was their power limited? Against her own inclination, she became aware of a slight, amused interest in the owner of those eyes.

"It would give us great pleasure if you would come and stay a few days with us in Town," said Mrs. Baldwin before leaving. "It isn't good for you to shut yourself up here and see no one. We can, I think, promise you a fair amount of enjoyment. You dance? Ah, I knew it!" she said as

she saw Dorothy's eyes flash sudden fire. "Then you must come to us next week. We give a small dance ourselves on Tuesday, and we shall quite look forward to having you with us. Come up on Tuesday morning, and stay till the end of the week."

"Yes, do!" echoed Violet warmly. "I am sure you will enjoy it. And we have engagements for several smart dances during the week, and we can promise you a 'good time,' as you say in America. You are American, are you not? Such an additional charm nowadays. And I really think Lillian and I deserve a little credit for our magnanimity in admitting so dangerous a rival, don't you?" Violet looked very winning as she smiled at Dorothy. And the latter's eyes sparkled with excitement.

Why shouldn't she accept this chance of enjoyment? She was young, and she adored dancing. Yes, she would go—and so she promised; later when her visitors had departed, she gave herself up to a study of her wardrobe and the devising of a ball-gown which should put to shame all others on the ensuing Tuesday night.

Then as the evening wore on, and she sat alone in her room with her finery all around her, she flung herself down on the floor in the midst of it, sobbing wildly, "Oh, Rodney, Rodney, what a despicable wretch I am! I won't go. What do I care for anything without you! It is you I want—you—you! Oh, why did you leave me? Why can't I go to you? I love you so. How could I

think of dancing, letting other men's arms come round my waist! How hateful I am! I will write to-morrow and say I won't come.'

But when the morrow came, the thought of the dream of a ball-gown that she evoked, once more asserted its fascination. The young blood so strong in her veins made the idea of dancing, the lights, the music, admiration, too ensnaring to her fancy. The letter of refusal did not go. Instead, Dorothy herself drove up to Town, and the vision of crêpe and silk was put into actual preparation.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Violet asked Lillian the evening after their return from Twickenham, as the sisters were dressing for dinner.

The latter, with her slow, clear enunciation, replied: "I think she is detestable. She is one of those women who would run off with somebody else's husband, if she felt keenly enough about it; who wouldn't mind any scandal, if she felt it worth while. She is dangerous, and Sir Geoffrey is in love with her." Lillian was not looking at Violet, and she did not see the pained look that flashed in her eyes, did not mark the way in which the slight fingers clenched themselves, the sudden bracing up of her body as if to meet a blow.

Violet did not speak for a moment, and when she did her voice sounded tired. "Don't you think you are rather hard on her, Lillian? You don't generally give your imagination such rein. She seemed to me very bright, and clever, and fascinating."

Lillian turned and looked at Violet, and then, with her usual indifferent manner that nothing seemed able to stir, went on: "Well, you know, I didn't talk much; I never do, and consequently I have some time and opportunity to think. And, Violet, I tell you I would as soon trust a snake as Dorothy Deming. She is one of those women who love to play a part, the more dramatic the better it will be to her liking. I am sorry she is coming here, and I am sorry Sir Geoffrey likes her, for she is the sort of girl who makes a man like a whipped hound, ready to crawl to her side at any time for a caress."

Violet looked at her sister in astonishment. Never had she heard Lillian give such a long dissertation on any acquaintance. Never had she suspected her of such powers of character analysis. A strange feeling of sadness crept over her. For the first time in her life she doubted herself. Never could she wield such power over a man as Lillian imputed to this Dorothy Deming. No man would so hunger for her love and caresses as to crawl to her side like a whipped hound, as Lillian put it. Then all the pure young womanhood in her rose in fierce denial of wish for any such power. Ah, no! never, never would she desire to inspire love of that low order. Love that she would have must be of degree to allow reverence on her part. There was none of the panther-like destroying grace that was Dorothy's in Violet Baldwin's nature. She recognized its existence in the other, her understanding enlight-

ened by her sister's words, and the knowledge of it revolted her, and she found herself echoing Lillian's sentiment, "I am sorry that she is coming."

CHAPTER X

TUESDAY came, and with it Dorothy. The small dance at the Baldwins' was quite a smart affair, and Dorothy and her ball-gown both made an immediate and pronounced success. The newcomer, with her thoroughbred head so grandly set on the white throat, her strange green eyes brilliant with excitement, with her grace of carriage, her charm of manner and speech, was the subject of incessant remark to the hostess, who congratulated herself on the result of what she had been pleased to think of as "the experiment."

Dorothy was to all outward appearance radiantly happy. She had a sensuous delight in all beautiful effects, and a power of steeping herself in the same, almost childlike in its abandon, and which communicated itself to those with whom she was in contact, producing the brilliance and effervescence of champagne. Sir Geoffrey, seeing her so gay, surrounded always in the intervals of dancing by a little court of men, all evidently well entertained and appreciative, felt a mixture of pain and pleasure. Was she nothing but a vain and heartless coquette, drinking in the admiration

of the hour as waters of Lethe, drowning memory? Did all those passionate words he remembered so bitterly mean nothing? There was no suggestion of Tragedy in this girl, with her radiant, childlike grace. She looked as if created to float through life on a sun-lighted sea of love, and pleasure, and joy. Sir Geoffrey drew his brows together in a puzzled line, as he remembered the miserable, forlorn figure rushing through the storm-driven elements that he had followed that day down by the river, and whom he had half led, half carried back to the house, to give over to sickness and despair during those three dreary weeks. One would never suppose that a breath of sorrow had even momentarily touched the Dorothy of to-night. Again and again her laughter, dainty and musical, rang in his ear; again and again her brilliant eyes sought his, as if demanding sympathy in her pleasure. He felt himself utterly at a loss to understand her. That women had whims and moods beyond the reading of a man he knew, but surely none like unto hers.

He felt a welcome sense of rest in Violet's presence. She was so even in her manner, so quietly gracious. The thought came to him unexpectedly as he sat looking at her, how happy the man would be who loved her, and to whom she gave her love. There would be none of the hideous doubts, tormenting and exciting, which Dorothy's presence brought with it.

"Yes," said Violet, as if in answer to an unspoken thought of his, "she is very fascinating,

this friend of yours, and she seems to be enjoying herself. She is quite unlike other girls, is she not? She is a study. Mr. Boisey, like the rest, has fallen under her spell. He says she is a type almost unique—a compound of barbarity and fin-de-siècle-ism. It sounds fascinating, doesn't it? He says she is Russian and French and American, and that the result will some day astonish us!"

Sir Geoffrey's eyes hardened. He held old-fashioned notions as to the sacredness of women, and he hated even Boisey to discuss her in public. And yet, in the eyes of the little world assembled there, what a success she was! And Carstairs realized that so it would always be. The power and charm of her individuality would inevitably lead her to, and keep her in, the front rank.

And to Boisey Dorothy was saying: "Oh, if you knew how glad I am to see you, although, of course, I ought not to own up to it, after the disgraceful way in which you have deserted me! And you? Yes, I do believe you are a little bit glad to see me . . . confess!"

All the self-control he had been practicing in the last two or three months melted under the brilliant audacity of her glance.

"Oh, mademoiselle, mademoiselle," he laughed, "do you realize what a temptress you are? Would you have me perjure myself, and say I am not glad to see you, when you know I am . . . I am!"

Dorothy laughed, quite satisfied with the result of her question. "I like you to call me mademoi-

selle," she said; "no one else does. You may keep that for yourself—alone."

"May I?" and his eyes flashed warmly into hers. But that was his last word alone with Dorothy that evening.

"It has been perfectly charming and delightful," she said to her hostess that night, when, the dance over, the guests departed, she was bidding her good-night.

"And you look as fresh as if the evening had but just commenced," said Mrs. Baldwin admiringly.

Dorothy gave a happy laugh. "I never get tired," she said. "And excitement stimulates me. I adore it. It is like champagne to me—it is more, it is life!" And she laughed again as she went up the stairs to her room. And she would have laughed yet again could she have seen the look of dismay that passed from her hostess to her daughters.

"What shocking sentiments! How glad I am no one but ourselves heard her," murmured Mrs. Baldwin.

Lillian smiled quietly. "Miss Deming doesn't pause to consider the size or the sex of her audience on any occasion. The larger it is the better it appears to suit her. I overheard her telling Colonel Elliot in the presence of Mr. Boisey and half a dozen others, that life without love was like a tree without leaves, yielding no delight either to itself or the world; that the great misfortune of the present day was that people did not know how

to love well enough; that there was too much analysis of the sentiment without any sentiment to analyze; and that she could not imagine anything more horrible than the commonplace life of the average English wife!"

"My dear Lillian, you can not really mean what you say!" protested Mrs. Baldwin. "Whatever could the Colonel and the others have thought!"

"They seemed to like it," answered Lillian dryly. "You see what a success she had all the evening, how eager the men were to be introduced to her, and then how she held them."

Mrs. Baldwin had to agree. She could only smile sadly. And upstairs Dorothy was in her room, alone, standing before a full-length mirror, surveying herself in rapt content.

"Yes, you have been a success to-night. You are charming, charming!" she cried, and she waved an airy kiss to her reflection, and made it a graceful, sweeping courtesy. Five minutes later her head was on the pillow, and she sank at once into the sound, irresponsible sleep of a tired child. The two days following were passed in a maze of excitement. She had no time to think. Each hour brought with it an enjoyment, and Dorothy showed herself able to bear the strain of sustained necessity to please. More than once she remarked to Violet: "It is all entrancing! I wonder now how I could be content to stay so quietly alone. I love it all; the gay, pleasant people, the sunshine of the day, the lights and music of the evening! It is

adorable, and I am grateful to you for the pleasure you give me!"

And Violet on each occasion had smiled quietly, realizing that the girl was drunk on the incense offered to her vanity, then wondered what the reaction would be, and when it would come.

"I am glad to see you are having such a good time, Dorothy," said Sir Geoffrey, on the third day of the visit. They were at a lunch party given by the novelist, Boisey, and Sir Geoffrey had had the good fortune to find himself seated on one side of Dorothy.

"Yes," she said happily. "And do you remember how hateful I was about it all in the beginning, and how cross you were, and how I warned you about your temper! You took my lesson seriously, did you not? Ah, forgive me, Sir Geoffrey," she cried impulsively, as she saw the shadow on his face. "You are always too good to me. Why are you, I wonder? You are very blind, for I am not worthy of your patience!" Was it by accident that her glance traveled to the other end of the table and rested on Violet's face, and unconsciously led Sir Geoffrey's after it?

"It is because I can not help it, and you know the reason, Dorothy," he answered low, as his eyes came back quickly to her face.

She let hers meet his and linger. "Why is it that everything goes crossly to our purpose," she said wearily. "It is no good to waste time, however, in trying to solve a problem that is so evident and yet so puzzling," she added quickly.

"Therefore, Sir Geoffrey, let us make the most of this pleasant, shining hour, for to-morrow—who knows——" She shrugged her shoulders with the inimitable grace of a Parisienne.

"And," said Sir Geoffrey, "I am glad you like the Baldwins."

"I like them because I see so little of them," she answered maliciously. Then, seeing how shocked and pained Sir Geoffrey looked, she went on: "There have been so many engagements, and there are always people around, you know. I have not had five minutes alone with the girls since I came, and really I have not thought of it—as why should I? I have been so well amused. As it is we get on perfectly together. And then, you know, Sir Geoffrey, I am not the kind of a girl other girls like; and for myself—well, frankly, I doubt if I like other girls even as well as they like me." She smiled a wicked little smile, and looked at Sir Geoffrey corner-wise to see to what extent she had succeeded in shocking him this time.

He remained silent. When she launched forth into flippant sallies against her own sex, not all his love could keep him from being deeply hurt. It jarred him to recognize this streak of what to him seemed unwomanliness in his idol. She paid no further attention to him, and he had no opportunity later on of speaking with her alone. It seemed she always had a sort of royal progress, that she was a sovereign holding her court.

The next morning the outside world was gray

with steadily falling rain, and a persistent chilly wind, and when Dorothy came down to the breakfast table her mood reflected the atmospheric conditions. She anticipated a dull morning in the society of her hostesses. Then she remembered with relief that Sir Geoffrey and Boisey were among the half dozen people invited that day to lunch. She liked Derwent Boisey. It flattered her vanity that he should deem it worth his while to devote so much of his attention to her; and she knew it was something more than chance, the result of belonging to the same "set" as the Baldwins, which had caused his appearance at all the functions she had shared in this week. He was studying her, but it was in such a quiet and altogether deferential way, that she was flattered, not annoyed.

"Can't you put me in a book?" she had suggested to him the day before.

"I should like to—five years hence," he had replied.

She had returned his gaze steadily. "Yes," she had answered, more as if to herself than to him, "then it would probably be worth while. See," she had added impetuously, "you know the world of men and women—you see types, where others see mere machines of flesh and blood, and you—you with your experience and theories, you know—you feel—is it not so—that I am not destined to tread the highways of commonplace? You feel, do you not, that fate has something in store for me, different, say—to what it holds for girls like

Violet and Lillian Baldwin?" She had paused breathlessly, and Boisey's face was overspread with a mingled sadness and interest. Her superb egotism amused him; then, as he thought whither it might lead her, he was conscious of a shuddering pity. He had the feeling of one looking on, held by some strange paralysis, while a little child walked heedlessly over a precipice.

"My dear mademoiselle," he had answered gravely, "believe me there is nothing to desire in a fate leading beyond the beaten track; nothing to hold in contempt in the outwardly peaceful lives you stigmatize as commonplace. Capacity for extraordinary experiences involves capacity for extraordinary suffering."

"Yes," she had interrupted, "but how much better to do everything intensely, suffer, enjoy, love, than to go through life always on a dead level! I could suffer—ah, yes——" She had broken off abruptly, a somber, tragic look overshadowing her eyes, startling Boisey.

It was not all to come then, he had thought; life had already touched her, and his interest in her intensified. That had been the evening before, and for a moment she had stood before him, in the pride of her youth, set off with all the finery of ball attire, rare exotics round them in the artistically lighted conservatory, sounds of music floating in the distance; and the picture of that slender girl with her crown of red-brown hair, the shadow of tragedy dimming her radiance, stamped itself on his mind; and ever after, by

closing his eyes and concentrating his thoughts, he could bring the vision clearly before him, could evoke the very tones of her voice: "I could suffer—ah, yes——"

And now this morning Dorothy sat and looked through the window panes at the rain, and made no effort to conceal the gloom it cast upon her spirits. She resigned herself sullenly when Violet and Lillian led the way to the drawing-room. The former opened the grand piano, and seating herself before it, let her hands wander idly over the keys.

Dorothy came across to her. "Yes, play," she said, and there was a singular reproduction in her voice of the dominant note that had rung in Leonore Deming's voice when she had urged Fairfax to play in her death-hour. But the music which the younger woman's command now evoked was altogether different from the demoniacal grandeur of sound that had echoed through the old homestead on the Hudson.

Both Violet and Lillian were skilled executants, and daintily now did the slim fingers produce correct and melodious harmony, but there was no subtle suggestion of deeper meaning, no soul speaking to soul; and all at once a chill look of utter indifference spread across Dorothy's expressive countenance. She turned wearily away, and walking over to one of the big windows, looked out on the rain-sodden street.

And still the pretty, soulless music went on, and she grew sick with longing for the touch of a mas-

ter hand on the violin strings, the sound of those weird passionate melodies which seemed ever ready to spring into glorious life at Rodney's will. And suddenly all her surroundings grew abhorrent to her. The quiet artistic furnishing of the room which had hitherto appealed to her sensuous perception of the beautiful, and filled her with content; the conventional music; the unemotional high-bred natures of the sisters—she hated all for the moment, with the strength of her undisciplined passion. She had a fierce desire to get away from it all, to find herself in some untrammelled waste of country. It was as if she was stifling for want of breathing room.

She crossed over to the piano swiftly, marking to her content that Lillian had left her alone with Violet, and with sudden passionate demand in her voice and eyes, addressed the startled girl.

"Tell me," she said, "do you believe in the soul—do you believe there is something more, something higher in us than the tangible machine we call ourselves—something, if we only knew how, if only we were pure enough, spiritual enough, we could command to bear us whither our poor wretched bodies, enslaved by the material laws of nature, can not lead us?"

Violet's hands sank quietly together on her knees, and a wonder—half shocked, half pained—crept into her eyes.

"Surely," she answered, and her voice took on the low, solemn sound common to most people when speaking of their sacred things, "surely I

believe in the soul. But I had not thought of it in the light you speak of, as a power to use to our service. That seems to me an impious thought. I wonder how you could dare let it cross your mind." There was a sudden flash of righteous indignation in her voice that amused Dorothy.

"I—" she laughed hardly. "I never think whether I dare, or whether a thing be right and proper according to the fashion of others. I do, and think, as I will. If a thought comes to me, I let it enter, and see if it be worth while to give it abode. I like to believe in a soul, because it would seem horrible to me to think that death ended it all, that my soul would no longer meet and know the soul of my love. If I did not have him, if I did not love him, it would not matter so much, do you see? Can't you see that I couldn't bear it, life would be impossible, if I thought this ended it all; that we should only belong to each other now; that if I died he would be mine no more; that if I lost him on this earth I should find him in no world beyond—I shock you—you can't understand such love as I speak of. How should you—you conventional English girl? I tell you I would endure endless torment, though it led me to wander through countless worlds until I found him." She paused unexpectedly, and the two girls looked at each other steadily for a moment. Dorothy saw the involuntary shrinking of Violet's slender figure, the expression of outraged maidenly modesty, the conventional repulsion from all outward form of violent emotion; and

Violet saw a girl flushed, brilliant, nay, almost beautiful under the glow of passion's fiery touch.

Dorothy leant nearer to her, and her eyes seemed to burn into the other's. "You do not like me," she said. "Nay," smiling, "you are too well-bred to affirm it, but you are also too truthful to deny it. My instinct rarely deceives me, and I know you do not. I shock you. You do not approve of me. I told Sir Geoffrey how it would be." She kept her eyes fixed on Violet's face, and at this moment she made a discovery. "She loves Sir Geoffrey! Poor little fool! in her way she cares!" Then the devil of vanity gave her a mental nudge, as it were, and under its influence her next words fell lazily, idly, it seemed, but they hurt Violet Baldwin as she had never been hurt before.

"Sir Geoffrey should have shown better judgment, Miss Baldwin. He should have fallen in love with you! You would have suited each other admirably, I should think. Like you, he does not approve of me, and yet——" She paused and gave her shoulder an infinitesimal shrug more eloquent than words.

Violet's eyes did not flinch, only a quiet contempt and disapproval grew in them, and suddenly, without any apparent cause, Dorothy felt ashamed, and with her usual impulsiveness, she cried: "Miss Baldwin, forgive me. After all your kindness and hospitality, it was hateful of me to jest upon such a subject. But, you know, I was never disciplined like you. I have had no

mother's love—no memory of it——” She stopped abruptly, and her face changed to an expression so appalling in its gloom and misery, that Violet shrank for the moment; then her womanly sympathy asserting itself, she laid her hand on Dorothy's arm and spoke warmly: “Miss Deming, you must have had great trouble indeed. To have no memory even of one's mother! I can not bear to think of it. You are younger than I, and you must be so alone. Won't you let me be your friend? I will try to understand, and perhaps I shall succeed. That we are so different is no reason I can not exercise what imagination I possess, and try to see things with your eyes somewhat before venturing to sympathize or judge—judge, nay, I used too strong a term. How can one woman presume to judge another, unless indeed, they see, think, feel alike!”

Dorothy looked at the pretty, flushed face, listened to the pleading voice so evidently sincere, with quiet curiosity. It seemed to her that she had lived a lifetime longer than this girl, though their years numbered nearly the same. “You are very good—too good,” she answered, “but it can not be; it would be a failure, I am sure. I feel my life so apart from that of the ordinary careless girls around me. I came into your world for a brief span, but I am not of it. You yourself see that, although I bear my part outwardly well enough. But the real self—my ego—is bound to come to the surface once and again to breathe; and it is too dramatic, too emotional, too uncertain to suit

the narrow track of conventionality; it is sure to go off at a tangent once in a while at a pace you could not follow. No, Miss Baldwin, I am not the girl to wish for or to have women friends. Believe me, I should only vex and disappoint you, although I think perhaps I could make you like me in time." She smiled very bewitchingly on Violet. "But it is best not. I have the feeling sometimes that I carry a tragic influence with me, and that those I come in contact with are bound to suffer through me—and when I think of Rodney—— Do you know Mr. Fairfax?" she asked abruptly.

"No," said Violet. "I have heard of him. And he—is he built on the same intense lines? He adores you, of course—no other love would satisfy you."

Dorothy looked at her for a moment in silence; her face grew deadly pale, and her eyes were overcast as with a dense shadow; then with an effort so controlled however as to be suggested rather than evident, she said: "Oh, yes, he adores me. I sent him away for a time to prove how great our love was. You see I am all made up of strange moods and fancies; you see how impossible it would be for you to understand or like me."

In that involuntary pause, however, after her words, "he adores you, of course," Violet made a discovery. She loves him more than he does her. And instinct told Dorothy of the fact, and she felt that she hated Violet Baldwin.

"Listen," she cried, spurred on by sudden

need. "I can not remain here longer. You have been kind to me, but I am stifling—I must get away, back to his home, where I can be in touch with him. I am all out of tune now with you and your gay friends. I could not meet them. Do you understand? I could not! This is no whim. I must go. I could not see Sir Geoffrey. There are times when his very presence is abhorrent to me; and this is one. Will you tell your mother—ask her to forgive me—make any excuse you like. But go I must, and at once. I am glad your sister was not present to hear all my wild talk. She would have understood less than you. She would have thought me mad."

She went swiftly from the room and Violet made no effort to detain her.

When the guests arrived for lunch, there was an atmosphere of disquiet apparent to both Sir Geoffrey and Derwent Boisey. Not all her good breeding could keep a look of annoyance from shadowing Mrs. Baldwin's face, and although Violet was as serene as usual, Lillian wore an expression of malicious satisfaction, which, however, did not degenerate into anything more than a suggestion. On his entry, Mrs. Baldwin drew Sir Geoffrey on one side. "Where is Miss Deming?" at once asked Boisey of Lillian. She smiled before replying—no one had ever heard Lillian or Violet laugh heartily; they were rarely stirred beyond the limit of slow, gracious movement of the lips. "Miss Deming I presume got tired of us all at once. She disappeared suddenly about an

hour ago, and Violet chooses to be mysterious and mother cross!"

"The barbarian broke through the eggshell of French polish, and found the light of society too aggressive," murmured Boisey to himself. And all through lunch he found himself speculating as to what had been the cause of the fair Dorothy's flight. He missed her presence more than he would have deemed possible. Instead of the graceful, stimulating conversation he had looked forward to during some part of the hour, he found himself compelled to furnish entertainment for Lillian Baldwin, a girl who never appealed to his interest in any form, and he was almost angry with himself when he found how great the effort was. Sir Geoffrey was better situated, for seated next to Violet, she seemed to understand how great his vexation was, how unfit he felt himself for the social gamble, and she gave him a quiet and sympathetic appreciation that touched him and made him infinitely grateful.

And down in the house by the Thames, Dorothy was whirling round and round in the wide hall in a strange fantastic dance of joy, while Mrs. Morton, the housekeeper, looked on aghast.

"Laws, Miss Dorothy!" she cried, "are you *that* glad to get back to this lonely old place?"

And Dorothy laughed aloud in sheer happiness as she paused a moment in front of the stout, matronly woman; then without warning, she put her arm round the housekeeper, and drew her into the swing of the dance, never heeding her expos-

tulations. Round and round they tore, the impetus of Dorothy's mad whirl keeping the elder woman afloat as it were, while the cook and the housemaid, attracted by the commotion, came up from the kitchen, and stood looking on in greatest glee. Then the wild gayety of the moment entered into the soul of the housemaid, who was young and frivolous, and her feet began to move in time with Dorothy's, only her strict sense of decorum holding her body in restraint. But Dorothy saw the moving feet, and her eyes sparkling brightly, she called out over her shoulder as she circled past with the panting, heated housekeeper, "Dance! Dance! the hour is great!"

The housemaid needed no second invitation; she caught the cook gayly round the waist, and swept her on in Dorothy's wake. The spirit of revelry seemed to have taken possession of them all. It was a scene for an artist with a sense of humor. The large square hall with its dark oak panels, its somber draperies, and the subdued light thrown over all through a stained glass window at the upper end, the revolving figures of the women, made up a picture at once odd and fascinating; one that would have delighted the unconventional soul of Rodney Fairfax, could he have witnessed it.

And Dorothy, herself, as she sank into a chair, tired, happy, laughing, should have been an inspiration!

That night she slept like a child. The morning hours passed on glad wings; every corner of the

house was visited, and the happiest moments were spent lying back in the depths of Rodney's favorite armchair, her eyes closed, her thoughts enwrapped about the image her imagination evoked.

Later, however, a slow, heavy rain began to fall, and with it her mood changed. She grew depressed, uneasy. She found herself wondering why neither Boisey nor Sir Geoffrey came. A little, imperious frown puckered her forehead, at their defection. As for Carstairs he should have shown his allegiance earlier. But afternoon and evening passed, and he did not appear. The next day it was the same, and Dorothy grew decidedly cross. She began to think how little her presence must have meant to them all, since her absence caused no comment. It was a blow to her vanity, and the gloom deepened daily on her face. A whole week passed, and yet no sign either of Sir Geoffrey or Boisey.

Dorothy hated herself, her life, and everything in those lonely days. Wild ideas of starting in pursuit of Rodney teased her.

Why had she ever allowed him to leave her? In those far lands might it not chance that he might meet his ideal, that "harebell" specimen of womanhood he had lauded? The thought drove her almost mad. She could not sleep; it was as if some fever consumed her. She read the five letters she had received from Fairfax, and it appeared to her that the last, dated from Aden, and received just prior to her visit to the Baldwins,

was shorter and colder than the others. It seemed a confirmation of her worst fears.

And yet, what could she do? She felt chained, helpless!

And what could possess Sir Geoffrey? But at least Derwent Boisey might have understood, and have come to her.

CHAPTER XI

IT was not without a struggle that Boisey had kept away from the Willows. Through Carstairs he knew of Dorothy's engagement to Rodney Fairfax, knew also of the latter's absence from England, which, from whatever point of view considered, appeared absolutely unaccountable and contradictory. The more he thought of Dorothy, the more of a problem did she and her future present, and the more disquieting and fascinating the attempted solution. She was Fairfax's promised wife, therefore, he, Derwent Boisey, was constrained to admit the necessity of withdrawal from temptation. He had to hug the substance of honor to down the shadow of desire. He saw nothing of Carstairs, who was engaged in fighting his own battle, and the Baldwins were politely silent on the subject of Miss Deming. Imagination tore possibilities to tatters, and returned empty on itself, having nothing wherewith to furnish nourishment.

Meanwhile, if Dorothy had suffered in those

seven days, Sir Geoffrey had been even more miserable. Angry, wounded, sore, he determined to conquer his passion for this girl, who was so utterly reckless as to other people's feelings; who cared nothing for the construction the world might place on her wild actions; who thought of nothing save herself.

So for seven days Sir Geoffrey endured a martyrdom, and waged hourly conflicts between his pride and his inclinations, the only respite he allowed himself being the moments when he was privileged to enjoy a little quiet conversation with Violet Baldwin, who, with her sympathetic tact, seemed to act as an opiate on the wracked nerves of the young man.

At the end of the week, he said to himself: "I feel master of myself now. I can meet her without temper. I don't believe I care any more. I have no feeling, it seems; therefore I will go and see how it is with her."

His newly acquired composure was destined to be sadly tried, however. This Dorothy, who came forward languidly to greet him, whose eyes were glittering from out a face grown thin and sharp, and absolutely devoid of color; whose hand, as it lay in his, seemed to burn his flesh, like a live coal, was a very different Dorothy from the gay, reckless girl against whom he had been nursing his ire. His startled eyes amused her, and a miserable smile curved her lips.

"I look hideous, don't I?" she said, and even her voice was changed, so dull and old, that at its

sound Sir Geoffrey's anger died a sudden and complete death. Taking both her hands in his strong clasp, he asked:

"What is it, Dorothy? Has anything happened?"

"No!" she answered wearily, as she withdrew her hands. It seemed to him that it might be a woman of thirty speaking instead of a girl of eighteen!

"What has changed you so then, Dorothy?"

"My ignorance—my want of knowledge—about him. Sir Geoffrey, I must go to him. I can not stay here alone, any longer. It is driving me mad! Can't you see that it is? You told me how my appearance shocked you, when you entered the room. You needed no words. If I have grown like this in seven days, how will it be with me in a month, six months, a year? I tell you I can not bear it." She swayed backwards and forwards on her chair, in dry-eyed misery.

"Why not write and tell him? He will surely return!" suggested Carstairs.

"Yes, and how am I to live through the weeks that must go by before his reply can reach me?"

Sir Geoffrey felt himself utterly at a loss. He did not understand the temperament of this girl; he had no experience to guide him, nothing but the instinct of a simple, kindly nature.

Quite suddenly Dorothy laughed, and rising from her chair began to pace the room.

"I shock you, as I shocked Violet Baldwin. You two can understand each other, but not me."

She paused abruptly before him. "She is a nice girl, Sir Geoffrey, why don't you marry her?"

The sudden blaze of anger in his eyes, the stern pallor of his young face, startled her.

"How dare you ask me such a question, Dorothy? I can marry no woman but you, because I love you—Good God! what am I saying?" He pulled himself up short, as he remembered he was speaking to Rodney Fairfax's promised wife.

But she was smiling straight into his eyes, with something of the amusement of a grown-up person listening to the pranks of a child.

"You will get over that foolishness, some day. Oh, yes, believe me. I am a witch. I can foresee. I can prophesy——" And without the slightest warning, she flung off her gloomy mood; her eyes lightened; her lips parted gleefully, and she clapped her hands in a childish way she sometimes affected; her voice regained its youthful tone, and, behold! it was something resembling the brilliant Dorothy of old, who mocked him now, to his bewilderment.

"Tell me," she asked quickly. "Did Mr. Boisey say anything of me? He would understand me better than you, Sir Geoffrey. I wish I could see him. Would he come if I asked him?"

"I can not possibly say!" returned Sir Geoffrey stiffly.

Dorothy laughed; "Not unless you ask him! Won't you? It would interest me. I want rousing. I begin to see the folly of fretting myself to death here alone. You showed it me, Sir Geof-

frey? Can you guess how? No? Why, because you looked shocked when you saw me! Bring Mr. Boisey with you in three days from now—that will give me time to grow pretty again! What would Rodney say, if he could see me now?"

She was looking at her reflection in the glass, with grave concern. And Sir Geoffrey again felt that strange revulsion of feeling which had once or twice overtaken him at some thoughtless speech of hers, betraying her all-absorbing egotism.

And just at the moment it did not seem so hard a task she had given him, this bringing of Derwent Boisey into her presence.

Three days later Carstairs accomplished his mission, to his own surprise not without difficulty. The novelist had evinced a strange reluctance at first to accompany him down to the house by the Thames. He pleaded a new work, which demanded his attention; tried to back out under an excuse of literary duty demanding seclusion.

Geoff Carstairs laughed at him: "What poseurs you writing fellows are! You know you are only humbugging. Your book is out; it's caught people by the throat—that's not the right way to express it, perhaps—anyhow, it's a success. You can afford to rest on your laurels for a time. Any one would think you were afraid of Dorothy! But of course that's not possible!" Again he laughed.

"Of course—not possible!" rejoined the other, but Carstairs could not tell whether he was joking or serious.

Boisey busied himself for a few minutes about

his papers—put some loose sheets of manuscript together, and then laid them away in a drawer of his desk. "I'll come!" he said abruptly, turning to his visitor.

"That's right!" approved the younger man. "Get on your coat and hat, and we'll be off."

Dorothy made no attempt to hide her gratification when Sir Geoffrey proclaimed his victory.

"You've no idea the trouble I had to induce the beggar to come," he said, with a sublime disregard of tact. Boisey could have kicked him, when he noticed the flash in Dorothy's eyes.

"Don't be an ass, Geoff!" he remonstrated. "Nothing but a sense of duty to work could have kept me away so long. Such an impersonal rival will perhaps find excuse for me in the heart of mademoiselle!"

Dorothy laughed. "If I could believe you?"

"Mademoiselle, I assure you that I found duty such an extremely disagreeable mistress that it was not without a struggle I kept to my allegiance—grant me a little compassion therefore, and at least believe me."

The smile died suddenly out of Dorothy's eyes. "What fools we are to stick to that allegiance! I hate the name of 'duty.' Had I not yielded to a mistaken and impulsive idea of duty, I might be happy now, instead of so unutterably wretched." She turned abruptly away, took a few quick steps towards the river, then as swiftly returned, her eyes brilliant through unshed tears, her lips smiling. "A truce to melancholy," she cried gayly.

"I did not invite you here to listen to my moan, but to cheer me. I want to be cheerful, to laugh, to sing, to keep myself from growing old and ugly, I want Rodney to admire me, when he returns, not to find me 'gone off.' Help me to keep myself pretty for him."

She stretched out a hand to either man. They did not look at each other, as they clasped a hand, conscious of the disturbance the deviltry of her glance provoked, doubly conscious of the magnificent egotism, impervious to self-risk, which made it possible for her to dare so much. Boisey was acutely sensible of the extraordinary interest this girl possessed for him. He was attracted to her—passionately, intellectually, yet he was conscious above the stimulating charm of her society of a sub-stratum of doubt, at times amounting to repulsion. He realized, now that he found himself once more in her presence, after days of abnegation, the danger, and rather despised himself for enjoying the sensation. But she was going to be the wife of Fairfax—consequently the danger he took was at his own risk, and it was only for him. He understood absolutely that he was studying one of the rare types capable of a great passion. So he alternately soothed and irritated his conscience. He translated without difficulty her pretty egotism, when later, discovering that he had traveled through India and the East, she insisted, in her imperious way, on his telling her all he knew of the country, its people, their customs and ways, drinking in every word with a rapt at-

tention which did not deceive him. It was the progress of Rodney Fairfax she was joining in—not the past adventures of the narrator. As she listened, she seemed to be following the former, and that day was the happiest she had spent, since his departure.

“Come again and soon!” she said to Boisey, with unmistakable emphasis. Poor Carstairs remembered, with a pang, such words had never been given to him.

Boisey ceased to question himself. He was drifting along, on a tide of pleasant intercourse, a tide, flowing so smoothly that the remembrance of possible hidden rocks was forgotten. The girl’s unconcealed devotion to her absent lover was so frank and unconventional that it left no excuse for self-delusion on the part of the novelist, and he allowed himself to believe that his interest in her was simply one beneficial to his art.

In her letters to Fairfax, Dorothy spoke of Boisey freely:

“He is the only comfort I have! He tells me of India, of the other countries you will travel across, and I am with you in spirit. I think of you always, and I can picture you as, without him and what he has told me, I could never have done. You must be friends, Rodney. He is quite a personage too, and honors me with his friendship. His last book was a veritable sensation. I tell him he must put *me* in the next. He says in—‘five years’ time’—Then I hope I shall be too

prosaically happy to be worth writing about!" So ran a passage in one of her missives.

It was about a month after Christmas that Sir Geoffrey received a letter from Fairfax, containing a paragraph which filled him with uneasiness.

"I have just accepted an invitation to spend a week with Colonel Griswold and his daughter. I am still in Calcutta. Strange, does it seem? I have made some charming acquaintances, Miss Griswold one of the number. She is an actual realization, in appearance, of the ideal we were discussing that September afternoon down by the river—'Like a hare-bell bending to the wind.' Do you remember?"

Did he remember? He shuddered with a premonition of coming evil. If anything happened! Instinct had made him aware from the first that Dorothy had not reached the heart of Fairfax—and fires which are slowest in kindling are often fiercest in burning; and if this Miss Griswold was to be the torch to Fairfax's—why, then, what of Dorothy? Sir Geoffrey dashed the thought aside, appalled at the vista it opened up.

That afternoon he went to Dorothy.

"Is it not strange," she began abruptly, after her first greeting, "that Rodney lingers so long in Calcutta? The last four letters have all been dated from there. The one to-day——" She broke off, as if on the point of revealing something, and her eyes scanned the young man's face. But he had learnt to school his features of late, and she went on:

"He, who hates cities, who longed for this tour to enjoy the vast solitudes of nature, what is he doing there? What has he found in the gayeties of the Calcutta season to stifle the artist side of him? I am distracted. Sir Geoffrey, can't you help me? Can't you guess? Does he never write to you?" She was looking at him; she saw his glance waver, in an instant her quick intelligence grasped the meaning. She laid her hands on his arm.

"You have heard? What does he say? Is there anything I do not know?"

Sir Geoffrey was at his wits' end.

"Now, Dorothy, do be calm and sensible——"

"Calm! sensible!" she flung the suggestion away.

"Tell me what you know. Is he well? Why are you so slow?" She gave his arm an impatient shake.

"You interrupted me, Dorothy!" he protested. "I only had a few lines. He seems to be enjoying himself; charming people——"

"Enjoying himself! Rodney speaking of charming people! Why, he has always detested them as strongly as I! What does it mean?"

Many a time Dorothy and Sir Geoffrey asked themselves that question in the following three weeks; for the mails passed, and no letter came for the girl.

Derwent Boisey was horrified at the havoc the uncertainty made in the appearance of Dorothy. Her temper, always capricious, suffered, and one

day, for some trifling disagreement (he had dared to blame her for giving way!) she turned upon him fiercely, and bade him go, and not return. And he had obeyed her.

For two weeks more he had no further word of her. Then, one evening, Sir Geoffrey burst into his presence, showing an agitation so great, controlled with so much difficulty, that Boisey felt instinctively it must have to do with Dorothy.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, Boisey, tell me what to do!" the young man gasped out. "I want you to tell her. I can't. Here, read this, and you will understand!" He thrust a letter into the novelist's hand. "Read it! Read it! Don't hesitate!"

Boisey sat down by the reading lamp, and proceeded to obey. But the younger man could not keep still. He paced the floor, his hands in his pockets, his feet kicking each other in a nervous way, as he waited for Boisey to speak.

The latter's face was very grave, as he quietly folded the letter.

"This is a bad business, Carstairs; about as bad as it can be!"

"The scoundrel! How are we to tell her?" ejaculated Sir Geoffrey.

"He asks you to do so!"

"I can't, Boisey. I haven't the nerve. I'd rather shoot myself than face that girl with such news as that! If you——?"

"And do you think I should enjoy it?" There was an odd expression in Boisey's eyes, as he put

the question, but it passed unnoticed by the other.

"No, of course not; only, you see, it's different with you—you don't—you never have——" He stammered and flushed.

"No, of course not. I never have"—the elder man interrupted, but the odd look flashed in his eyes again—"but all the same, you must admit, it is an ordeal any man might well shrink from. Besides, and perhaps you are ignorant of this, in a fit of temper,—or shall we say caprice, it sounds better,—the young woman dismissed me from her presence for good and all. So I don't see how I can intrude myself, and on such an errand. Why did he not act like a man, and tell her himself?"

He gave himself an angry shake, and for a moment there was an ominous glitter in his eyes, but it was quickly controlled, and there was no change in the even voice, as he went on:

"I would go to her, if I were you, Carstairs; and perhaps, who knows? it may mean——"

"Don't!" broke in Sir Geoffrey shortly.

"Forgive me. It was in bad taste."

"I can't do it, Boisey. I was never a coward before. But you—it is different for you! Be a good fellow, and do this for me, and I shall owe you a debt of gratitude too big for words."

And in the end, Derwent Boisey went.

CHAPTER XII

YOU are a strange man. You have courage to come here, and tell me what you have to-day!"

It was Dorothy speaking. She was standing by the fireplace in the library, one arm raised on the mantelpiece, the fingers toying idly, it seemed, with some snowdrops in a fragile Venetian vase, the other hanging straight to her side, the hand hidden in a fold of her gown. He had an instinct that the fingers of that hand were twined in agony around the senseless drapery. And yet she was so still, so cold. He asked himself could this be the girl whose frenzy he had dreaded! This, the interview he had shrunk from! It was all so well ordered; almost like a play.

"I needed courage!" was all he replied. They looked at each other silently, this man and woman; and in that hour, when all her soul was wracked with the thought of another man and the evil he had wrought her, the form and face of Derwent Boisey became painted on her mind's canvas in indelible colors.

"You remember, perhaps, that I had said I did not wish to see you again—and yet, you are here, and with such a message!"

How cold her voice was, and yet her cheeks were burning.

"Yes!" His acquiescence fell quietly.

What a study she was, this woman of strange

impulse! (Never again did he think of her as a girl!) He watched her, in silence, as she stood there toying with the snowdrops.

Then across the silence fell the sound of breaking glass. The flowers lay in a limp, white mass on the floor, between them! And now the strange calm of the woman had given way.

"Go!" she was saying. "Go and leave me to myself. Go, before I am utterly unnerved. No! You must! You shall! I warn you—you will be shocked—you will think I am mad—I can not answer for myself!"

And looking at her, he could not doubt the truth of her assertion. She was suffering. The manner of it but a moment before had compelled his admiration; but the revelation impending, he dreaded. He had no desire to witness the unlocking of the sluice-gates. He felt that the flood would bruise her; buffet her from shore to shore; leaving her, in the end—how? He could not help her now—— It was best he should go.

"Good-bye," he said. "Do you forgive me? The knife has cut deep, I know. God grant it has cut clean, so that the wound may heal; and some day, my child, it may be, the scar alone will remain."

She smiled straight down into his eyes. The memory of that smile never faded. He could always recall it, with its uncanny effect upon himself, sadder than any wailing or tears.

All that evening, and the whole of the next day, he was restless. He tried to settle down to the

accustomed routine of his work. In vain: ideas there were in plenty in his brain, but they would not fit into any given pattern: odds and ends of thoughts; disjointed pictures from memory's gallery; nothing that would arrange itself in rational sequence. Portraits of Dorothy Deming, it seemed, everywhere! Now her odd green eyes were searching his; now it would be a turn of her head in profile, showing the graceful throat outline: Dorothy gay; Dorothy sad; Dorothy coquettish; Dorothy proud, cold, contemptuous; Dorothy, as he had last seen her, with an agony in her smile too deep for words.

"Pshaw! I am bewitched!" he muttered angrily, to himself. "No study has held me so fascinated before."

"Is it as a study, or as a woman, pure and simple, that you find her so enthralling?"

Whence had come the thought? So swiftly, so plainly, it was as if spoken.

Boisey started, as if he had indeed heard the words. No sound came from him. After that first involuntary movement, he kept absolutely quiet. His face grew white, and after a moment's stillness he raised his right hand and pushed the hair back from his forehead. The action served to restore him to his normal poise.

"Absurd!" he spoke aloud. Yet the thought would not be downed. It recurred at intervals, and always accompanied by the same shock of displeasure.

At noon on the second day after his interview

with Dorothy a telegram was handed him. It ran:

"Come to me at once."

It was from Dorothy. As he was preparing to comply with the command, Sir Geoffrey was announced.

"I came here a dozen times yesterday, but couldn't find you!"

Boisey smiled, as he thought of the miles he had tramped, striving to tire out that persistent thought.

"I had your note, of course!" continued Sir Geoffrey, in rather an aggrieved tone, "But it said so little. How did she take it? What did she do? For heaven's sake, tell me something, man, and don't stand there like a stone. How I envy you your calm!"

Again that odd expression crossed Boisey's face, but it had passed by the time his lips opened.

"My dear fellow, if you will give me the chance, I will tell you what I know, which is nothing. Later, perhaps, I can tell you more, for she has sent for me." A fleeting thrill of satisfaction shocked him, as he gave utterance to the last words and handed the telegram to his visitor. "I am going to her now."

"She won't see *me*!"

There was an odd contrast in the tones of the two men. Sir Geoffrey caught the hand of the other and wrung it sharply. "Tell her how I think of her, how I love her! Ask her to let me do something for her—just to see her, to speak to her!"

The young fellow pleaded earnestly, but Boisey was angry with himself for feeling so unmoved, so averse to the rôle of message-bearer.

"I will ask her to see you. I am afraid she is suffering horribly."

Sir Geoffrey groaned. "It maddens me to think of it! If I could get at that fellow—damn him—I would kill him!"

"It's a good thing sometimes, that the opportunity is wanting to meet our capacity!" remarked Boisey sententiously. "I will see you later," he added, as they parted at the door.

He almost dreaded the impending interview. He realized what the intervening hours must have been to her. He found his heart beating more rapidly than usual, and a feeling of nervousness shook him, as he entered her presence.

She was sitting at a table, with writing-paper, pens and ink before her, and as she rose to meet him, he saw that the suffering had worked more outward ill than even he had been prepared for.

"How you must have suffered! How ill you look!" he murmured, as he took her outstretched hand.

"Yes!" she acquiesced. "I feel very ill. I hope I am going to die."

"Don't say that!" he implored hastily.

"No. I do not wish to talk about my feelings. I did not bring you here for that. I want to speak to you on business; to ask your advice about my affairs. Will you be seated at this table?"

She motioned him quietly to a chair, and herself took the one she was occupying when he entered.

"You see," she went on, still with that horrible deadness in her voice, "you see, it is impossible for me to remain here, any longer." She raised her hand in protest against his impending interruption. "No, I do not forget what Mr. Fairfax says"—she touched an open letter—"it has been emphasized by a visit I received from his lawyer yesterday afternoon—but it is out of the question—and it is about this that I wish to ask your advice. In this letter written to Sir Geoffrey Carstairs, and handed on to me by you, he says—nay, let me read it to you to refresh your memory:

" 'Dorothy must look upon the house at Twickenham as hers. I have instructed my lawyers, by this mail, to see to this and to make all arrangements in due form of a proper income for her maintenance as my ward. It is no return for what I have brought upon her; but at least she shall never know the want of money; and, on my return, I will see to it that she takes her proper position in society, if she wills it. I can not excuse my conduct. I can only throw myself upon her mercy. She is so young, and forgetfulness will come. It all came upon me suddenly; I can hardly realize that yesterday I was married——' "

Dorothy had read the lines in a monotonous voice, but now she stopped abruptly. "He is very

generous, you see, his ward shall know no material want. I have really no claim upon him——”

“No claim?” interrupted Boisey fiercely. “No, you were only the woman he had promised to marry. I sympathize with Sir Geoffrey, who has the thirst of blood on him——”

But she caught his arm: “Don’t!” she cried. “When *I* blame him, then *you* can say and feel such things. But I see it all—many things have become clear to me—he did not love me, as I loved him. It was not his fault. But he does not understand. I can not live here. I will not touch his money. I must go away. There are things I can do to earn my own living, surely. I can teach. I can go into a shop, some milliner’s, or some mantle house? You will help me, won’t you? I have relied on you.”

“Thank you!” he said quietly. “But I think you are wrong. You don’t know what a struggle with the world means to a woman, single-handed, young, attractive. The arrangement Fairfax proposes is your due——”

“Oh,” she interrupted angrily, “I thought you would understand! I was mistaken! I am afraid you can not help me. I will not rob you of your valuable time.” She rose from her seat, and looked his dismissal. But he took her hands, and gently pushed her back into her chair.

“I would do anything to serve you.” His voice carried conviction! “I sympathize with your sentiments; but as a man of the world, I can, perhaps,

see further ahead than you, poor child, blinded with your present pain!"

But she only shook her head in dissent. "I tell you that I will not live upon his bounty. I have thought it all out. Nothing that you can say will alter my decision. I have some jewels here—they belonged to my mother. They are mine to do with as I will; the only possession I have, not given me by him! I can part with those, they are worth a good deal——"

Her eyes were fixed on his meaningly. Boisey leant back in his chair.

"Oh, this is horrible—horrible!" he cried. "That you should have had to think of such an alternative; the necessity of it chokes me. Won't you listen to any compromise?"

"No, I will not. I must leave here, where every object in the house reminds me of him. I tell you it will drive me mad. I can not sleep. I have not been unconscious one hour, since the night before last, when you told me!"

Looking at her, he could well believe her.

"All the arguments you could hurl upon me would have no effect, because I am not like other girls. You know it, you acknowledged it from the first. They might suffer as keenly in the present, but for them, perchance, might come, as Rodney says, 'forgetfulness'——" The bitterness of her voice was indescribable.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

She got up without speaking, and left the room, returning in a few minutes with some old-fash-

ioned jewel cases in her hands. Laying them on the table, she opened them one by one, and displayed their contents.

Boisey felt an infinite pity stealing over him. Poor ignorant, reckless child! There was only one article of real value in the collection—an opal and diamond ring. The stones were of good size and brilliant. His voice had deepened and softened, when he spoke:

“And you are willing to part with these, your mother’s gifts?”

“She never loved me!” The words came distinctly, and the infinite pathos of the confession touched him deeply. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to take her in his arms and say: “Come to me. I will shield you from all this. I will be your protector, your friend, your husband!” But he realized, blindly perhaps, but nevertheless sufficiently, that such an action at that moment would be fatal. He must do what he could to save her from her own rash impulses, and bide his time.

“Poor child!” was all that he could find to say.

“Now you can understand what has made me unlike other girls—morbid, excitable, ill-governed. It is an heritage from her!”

“Poor child!” he repeated.

“There is one thing I want to ask of you,” she went on. “Don’t let Sir Geoffrey know my whereabouts, my plans.”

Conscience plucked at the fringe of memory’s veil: “But Carstairs loves you, his only desire is

to be of service to you." The scorn in her eyes added to his trial, but honor urged him to complete that trial. "He bade me tell you, and I gave my word."

Her glance softened: "And your word is to be trusted! But leave Sir Geoffrey's name out of the question. From henceforth he will pass out of my life."

"And you will have no regret?"

"No, absolutely none. He has a big heart, poor Sir Geoffrey! He should make some woman happy. But I could not appeal to him as I do to you. It is a strange thing that I should send for you, feel this way——"

"Your confidence honors me. And you will, in truth, look upon me as your friend, give me your trust, let me help you?"

"It is what I have asked of you. And now"—touching the jewels—"will you take the first step, will you sell these for me?"

"You are determined?"

"Yes, unalterably."

"You have ample time. Fairfax mentions three or four months before return."

"I must go. I can not stay."

"Suppose you give me to-night to devise some plan, to thoroughly master the situation, and then let me come at this hour to-morrow, and give you the result?"

"If you think it best," she assented wearily.

After he left her, Boisey's brain seemed to clear suddenly.

Yes, she was right, though nine-tenths of the world would give an opposite decision. He thought of the traitor, Fairfax, and his fists clenched. Married to his ideal—"the harebell bending to the wind"—consoling himself with the sophistries of a man with no practical experience of women—"youth! forgetfulness!" Boisey's lip curled. He had not thought it of Rodney Fairfax! The friendship of years died, lost in a whirl of contempt.

CHAPTER XIII

YES! he had arranged it all. He had made up quite a pretty-sounding story of the friend who was always looking out for ornaments of quaint, antique design; whose hobby it was in fact, and who would give her more than she could hope to obtain through any ordinary channel. The pattern of the future lay complete in the novelist's brain, as he went up to the door of the house, and pulled the bell. Yes, he would take all care off her hands, he thought, with a strange, warm sweetness glowing through him.

"Miss Deming is not here, sir. She left a note for you. Will you step in the library, and read it? It is there, you will find it on Mr. Fairfax's desk."

Boisey stood for a moment rather dazed: "Not here?" he stammered, then eagerly: "She will return soon!"

"I don't know, sir. She left the note."

"Ah, yes, the note!" His usual idle saunter gave place to a quick walk. Well he knew his way to the library! It was her favorite room. Yes, there on the writing-table, before which he and she had sat but yesterday, lay the square envelope, addressed to him. There were only a few lines within, but they blanched his face, and made him stagger, as he dropped into a chair.

Gone! and no clew! The letter began without formula:

"Last night again, I could not sleep. I sat and thought, and thought, and finally I concluded it were best to go forth alone, to be a burden to no one. After you left, I had doubts—I thought, he will help me, yes! but he will think it his duty to tell Sir Geoffrey, and later, Mr. Fairfax, on his return. That would kill me. So I put temptation beyond your reach, my friend. I absolve you from your promise, and I thank you for your readiness in making it.

"DOROTHY."

The first shock over, he was conscious of a growing and bitter anger against her. He felt as though he had hurled himself against a solid wall of egotism, and fallen back, bruised and maimed.

"Cruel! Selfish! Mad!" he muttered, and then the knowledge came to him, that he, Derwent Boisey, had grown to love this girl with a passion new to him, and the revelation came heavily

freighted with pain, laboring in a sea of doubt and wretchedness.

He must have sat there half an hour, before it occurred to him to make inquiries of the house-keeper.

She could tell him nothing. Miss Dorothy had left the note and gone out. She looked surprised, when he spoke of luggage. No, she had only carried her leather satchel, which she did sometimes, when she went out shopping. Did he think then——?

No, he thought she would return for dinner. He would call again in the evening.

Had he noticed how ill Miss Dorothy seemed? Was there anything wrong? Mr. Fairfax?

He was glad of her ignorance. Fairfax's marriage then was not yet canvassed in the servants' hall. He pulled himself together.

"My good woman, there can be nothing wrong. Miss Deming looks ill certainly, and you must take care of her. She is impulsive, and very likely has gone to see her friends, with whom she stayed before Christmas. Depend upon it she will return this evening, or telegraph to you."

The housekeeper eyed him curiously. She had her own ideas on the subject; and he himself was aware of a lack of the ring of truth in his voice. But gossip must be stayed, Dorothy's name kept clear.

He left the house, his mind in a chaos. Had ever the riddle of woman been so hard to read? It was a curious thing, that in spite of her youth he

never thought of her as a girl; but always as a woman, one who had lived and suffered; one whose years might number eight-and-twenty, rather than eighteen; and this, notwithstanding her quick transitions to childlike grace of manner. His first impulse was to see and question Carstairs, then he thought of her enjoinder not to let Carstairs know. All sorts of hideous possibilities crowded his mind, and, from his sheer inability to combat them in open fight, well-nigh drove him distracted.

Suicide, the word stood out in glaring letters, burning into his imagination. Perhaps even now—he shuddered as if cold water ran over him in winter. He had to face the truth. And *that* was likely! To her it would hold out allurements of refuge, of rest. What could he do? Set detectives on her track? The idea was repugnant, tarnishing to her name. He, the man usually fertile of resource, ready in plot, was for the moment at a loss, nonplussed by personal feeling.

How could he take calm survey, when every fiber seemed crying Dorothy, needing Dorothy?

There was nothing of the sweetness of love in his need, only an aching bitterness.

The hours till night left a blur on his mind of useless rushings from the house down there by the river up to the city's roar, then down again, only to find himself alone at midnight in his apartments, foiled, staring at a void of information.

Sir Geoffrey learnt the truth the next day.

"Gone!" he echoed blankly. "Gone! What do you think? You look as if you feared——"

The drops broke out on his forehead. He was almost unmanned.

For many days the search went on. Reluctantly professional services were called in; but the days passed on, and the hearts of the two men, who had loved her sickened, as the detectives reported daily no clew. Each day brought with it an increasing terror that the river might yield up its victim, for why else, except to end it all, should she have hidden from them?

Sir Geoffrey wrote to Fairfax, and did not spare him. "I hope that will sweeten his honeymoon!" he muttered as he sealed the letter.

He and Boisey walked the streets by day, each in different directions, and watched the bridges in the early night hours.

Boisey's face grew lean and haggard; and the stalwart Saxon beauty of the younger man was dimmed.

So the weeks and months dragged on; February, March, April, May, June, July; August even had run a day or two of its course, and both men had long since grown utterly discouraged. Sir Geoffrey took the gloomiest possible view of the case; the only consolation he experienced was in confiding his fears to Violet Baldwin. Boisey had always had the habit of keeping his own counsel. Carstairs held to the idea of the river and suicide; Boisey imagined even a darker possibility, realizing the girl's mercurial temperament. He did not pursue his midnight tramps with any regularity after the first three months, but intermittently a

desire would come upon him to go forth upon the quiet highways, and the bridges invariably attracted him. His imagination sometimes ran away with him in those lonely hours, and he dared not voice what his mind dared picture. And what material he unconsciously gathered, when half the city slept, and the other half awoke! He found it garnered in after years, though he had hardly been aware of the process at the time.

All through June and July every faculty he possessed had been concentrated on perfecting an elaborate scenario of a play, which was being dramatized from one of his own books by Alexander Gibbon, one of the foremost playwrights of the day, the work to be produced at a leading London theater in the following October. The thought of Dorothy was side-tracked in his mind.

He had passed many a night without leaving his desk, except for an occasional smoke, as he tramped up and down the room in order to relax his cramped muscles, while his brain still worked.

He was overdone; he realized that; and on this particular August night an impulse came to him to prowl once more, to give, himself a mental reaction in the contact—remote yet positive—with the moving throngs of people perambulating the unfashionable thoroughfares he made for, their day's work done. He was always attracted by this silent contemplation of the working classes in their leisure hours; and many a powerful touch upon the chord of human life, noticeable in all his work, he

owed to these night hours of solitary rambling in the London streets.

On this night in question he sallied forth, no thought of Dorothy troubling him. On the contrary, sensible of extraordinary mental fatigue, he was bent on emptying his mind, as far as possible, of every emotion. He wandered far, when, resultant probably from a mechanical mental process born of those other nights, when the bridges had been his haunting place, he found himself on Waterloo Bridge.

The chimes of a church clock broke out across the silence of the night.

"Twelve!" he muttered. "I may as well go back!"

It was full moon, and the river gleamed beneath him. He stood for a while, and gazed out over it in dreamy speculation. Was it cradling Dorothy on its cold bosom, Dorothy, pretty, brilliant, foolish Dorothy! He turned away with a sigh, and his eyes were suddenly arrested by a woman's form, dragging itself wearily, unsteadily towards him. Something in the slight figure stirred him to his depths. His heart beat fast; he drew his breath hard. She stopped short; her head was bent; then all he could afterwards recall was an unlifting of arms; the upturned face, with the moonlight full upon it; a short struggle; panting breaths; his arms tight around her; and a fierce cry: "Why did you not let me go? I want to die! Let me go, let me go!"

A woman's eyes flashed with fleeting fire into

his; a woman's form grew heavy in his arms; and Dorothy was found.

Her head lay back upon his breast. How white, and worn, and old she looked! The contour of youth lost, the bloom faded! and yet never had he yearned over her with such tenderness. Passion had no place in the pity which stirred him. It was only for a few seconds that she lay unconscious in his hold. The fever in her blood was too strong upon her: she opened her eyes, and looked at him with anger.

"Let me go!" she muttered.

"Yes—but I must go with you. Tell me where, and we will go together," he answered gently. She drew herself away, but swayed unsteadily, so that he quickly drew her hand within his arm; it was sweet to feel her leaning heavily against him!

"Whither?" he asked again.

Her eyes looked dazed, and she stared at him for a moment, as if she did not understand; and when she answered her voice was so low and hoarse he could hardly catch the words. He felt relief when he heard the name of the street she gave. He knew the locality to be a quiet and respectable one. Cabs were passing to and fro. He scanned them eagerly; at length he saw one unoccupied, hailed it, and two minutes later they had left the bridge behind them.

"Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy," he cried, and she did not seem to notice that for the first time he called her by name, "how could you be so cruel? Why were you afraid of me?"

"I thought it best!" she answered sullenly. She lay back in the corner of the cab, utterly indifferent. They were crossing the Strand now, and he looked at her. Her eyes were closed, her hair was pushed back in damp disorder from her forehead. The dainty curls he remembered so well were not there now; Dorothy must be wounded sore indeed for vanity to have died so completely! Something in the pallor and apathy of the sunken face, something in the swollen eyelids, a faint odor in the air struck a chill into his breast. But no! Death to the thought! How dared he insult her by giving it even fleeting entrance!

"Dorothy," he began hastily, "have you nothing to say to me? Has it never occurred to you that you might be causing suffering to others?"

She opened her eyes on him slowly: "I have not thought of you," she said.

The man felt as if she had driven a knife into him.

She caught his arm feverishly, and when she spoke, it was as if she just awakened from a dream!

"Where are we going?" she demanded.

He told her. He named the house in Southampton Row, the number of which she had given him.

"I can not go back there! She would not take me in. I have no money. She told me to go to-night; and I had nowhere to go to—and the river called me. It seemed to say it would bear me to Rodney. I thought I could float, and float, so calmly, till I rested in his arms. I thought he

would be sorry if he saw me dead. Why did you stop me? You have kept me from Rodney! I hate you! I hate you!"

She burst into hysterical, violent weeping. Once again, unbidden, unwelcome, the horrible suspicion clamored at Boisey's brain. Could it be? Doubt was fast becoming certainty, for the wild hysteria had ceased, suddenly, and she lay back, looking at him stupidly, maudlin tears coursing down her cheeks.

"Tell me, Dorothy, why did she say you must go? Was it because you could not pay her?"

"That—and other things," she answered sullenly, defiantly.

"Other things! What other things?"

The cab drew up at that moment before the lodging-house; and Boisey's heart sank, as he remembered the lateness of the hour, and saw that the house was in darkness. If the landlady had cause of complaint before, what would she say to this midnight return, under circumstances so suspicious. He got out, and bidding Dorothy remain where she was, till he came for her, he rang the bell and waited. He had to ring again, and then it was several minutes before any response came. When at length the door was gingerly opened, after some inquiries from an open window above, an exceedingly irate female showed herself.

By what means he subdued her displeasure Boisey did not divulge; but the sudden pressure of something hard within her palm, the glint of can-

dle-light on the yellow of gold, probably had a good deal to do with it.

"Wait and see if you can help her!" he said. "She is ill, unnerved. She has had great trouble. She is a lady. You need have no fear. Be good to her, and you shall not regret it. She has been foolish. She ran away from home—but she ran away alone!" He hated to speak of Dorothy, to be making excuses for her, to this woman, but instinct told him it was the only way.

The woman was evidently not bad-hearted. The suspicion on her face died out. "We have to take care of ourselves, sir!" she said. "The young woman had no friends; no one came to see her, and then——" She stopped significantly; and again Boisey's heart sickened.

"How long has she been here?" he asked.

"Only two weeks!" was the answer. When and how had the other months been passed? The woman opened the door of a front room and lighted the gas. The room struck cold even on that warm night.

"A bit of fire?" he suggested.

"The gas will warm the room enough," she answered.

Boisey went back to the cab, and opened the door. Dorothy did not move; she was lying back in the furthest corner. She did not stir when he spoke to her.

"Poor, exhausted child!" he thought, and shook her arm gently. "It is all right!" he said. She opened her eyes, and without speaking obeyed his

will. As she stepped from the cab, she swayed uncertainly, but his arm was around her, and he steadied her feeble steps into the house.

As she entered the room, and saw her landlady standing before her, smiling, ready to her service, Dorothy gave one wild glance of bewilderment from her to the man at her side, then burst into an hysterical fit of laughter.

They led her to the sofa, and she flung herself down on it, her arms outstretched on the pillowed end, her face buried upon them; and the laughter turned to sobs.

"Dorothy, Dorothy!" remonstrated the man, feeling thoroughly helpless.

"Leave her to me!" suggested the woman, and again something horribly suggestive showed itself in her countenance, and this time, in spite of himself, Boisey had to recognize it.

"You don't mean——?"

"Yes, I do!"

"My God!" broke from the man's white lips, as she walked to a sideboard, and, unlocking the doors, showed him a bottle of brandy, three parts empty.

How could this thing be true of Dorothy, that dainty girl, whose every word and gesture had spoken to innate refinement and delicacy! But hush! She was speaking. She had raised her head; her sobs had ceased.

"You had better go!" she was saying; then lower: "I should think you would *wish* to go!"

"I will come again to-morrow," he answered;

then turning to the landlady: "Take care of her!" And then he went.

Dorothy, left alone with the woman, gazed at her for a moment in silence; then a look of bitter shame crept over her face, and so keen, so dire was it, that even the unimaginative heart of the other woman felt the touch of it. Without a word of warning, Dorothy sprang from the couch, and with a wild rush across the room, she tore open the sideboard doors, and, seizing the bottle of cognac, held it for one moment poised high in the air, then hurled it, with all her strength, away from her, and it fell to the ground, broken. A short, gasping laugh, as the feverish strength was spent; then Dorothy fell, senseless.

CHAPTER XIV

SLEEP paid only short and intermittent visits to Derwent Boisey that night. The troubled hours passed by, and one thought possessed him—Dorothy must be saved! So young a soul, he dared not stand by and see it perish. To his own amazement he felt none of the rejoicing of the lover to whose arms Fate was throwing the object of his devotion. Love's pulses beat feebly, passion stirred him not at all; only pity, the strong man's sense of protection over a weak woman. He told himself in those night hours he had been mistaken; he had only imagined he had

loved her. He thought of those frequent visits to the old house down by the Thames! The girl's odd caprices and varied moods recurred to him, tantalized him. There had been days when she had been so bewildering kind, that any man might have been forgiven for dreaming of temptation, and succumbing to the sweet flattery of her glances. He thought of them—and of last night! She must be saved from herself! The sentence had a trick of reiteration which distracted him—saved, but how? The necessity of that question and the difficulty of answer deluded him still further into the belief that it had been attraction, not love, which had possessed him. Had it been love, no need of question. Her poverty, her distress had but served to bind him closer. But he had looked into her soul last night, and as he thought of it, he remembered only one vast, all-absorbing egotism. She must be saved—but how?

It was not until he was in her presence later in the afternoon, that he found his answer.

How fragile, how ill she looked as she came forward to meet him. Her face was colorless, her eyes deeply shadowed.

"It was good of you to come," she said, and then she sank down on a chair, as if too weary to live.

"You are feeling stronger, better to-day?" The question, as he asked it, seemed a mockery.

"No, I feel the same always. I have a terror of living. If I could only die! I say it to myself a thousand times a day, and last night I thought I

had found the courage, that I should never need to say it again—I am so tired of saying it—and then you came, and you hindered me! I do not forgive you for that.” She looked at him with a dull resentment, which hurt, then with sudden abandonment she flung her arms right across the table before her, and hid her face.

“Dorothy,” he said, “have you no self-respect? Are you going to ruin the bright promise of your life, without one effort to redeem it? Do you suppose that you are the only woman who has had the misfortune to place her love wrongly? Are you going to give up, where other women fight and conquer? You have courage. Summon it; hold it fast, and face the conflict!”

“No,” she answered drearily, raising her head. “Why should I? I can’t! He was my life. I feel like one dead now. I have no self-respect, as you call it. I care nothing for myself without him.”

Boisey’s face grew very stern, although it was evident he was holding himself under control.

“Dorothy, you don’t know what you are saying! Your life is not your own, given to you just for mere self-indulgence. Life holds sterner duties for us, my girl.”

“My life is my own!” she interrupted, with sudden fierceness. “And I claim the right to do as I will with it. Why do you wish to interfere? I wish you would go away. You trouble me. And I want so little—just to be left alone to die.”

“And it is just that I will not let you do!” The man’s power was asserting itself; dimly she felt

it; and with all the strength remaining to her, she determined to resist it. "What can it matter to you what I choose to do?" she asked curiously. "You have been very good to me. You know how low I have sunk——" Her pale cheeks were dyed crimson. "I have lost my self-respect. Would it not be better to end it all now, before I fall still lower? You have called yourself my friend; would you not rather see me dead than as I was—last night?" Her eyes were quietly raised to his, and her manner was that of one impersonally concerned in the matter.

"You are a strange, cruel woman! What does it matter, you ask, whether you live or die; rise or fall? I will tell you!" He took her hands, and forced her up, till she stood face to face with him (and now he knew that he had found his answer to that question). "It matters this much, that I want you for my wife. I could help you, Dorothy; I could help you to stand again, the proud, brilliant Dorothy I first saw! Shall it be? Will you give me the right to save you? You owe me something, for in your heart you know, that when the mood was on you, you tried to fascinate me—you made me care! And now you need me, and I will not let you go!"

It seemed to him, in the silence which followed, a hundred expressions flitted over her mobile face; but to them he did not hold the key; and they came and went too swiftly for easy translation.

She made no attempt to withdraw her hands from his clasp. Would she never speak? At last

her expression steadied itself into one of curiosity.

"You wish to marry me?" she said, as if she was not sure she had heard aright.

"Yes, I wish to marry you. I ask you to be my wife," he repeated firmly.

"After—last night?"

"Yes, after last night. Oh, last night," he broke out passionately, "last night shall be as it had never been. Last night was a nightmare! To-night we waken from that, Dorothy, and henceforth a sweeter reality than those past hideous dreams shall be yours. I will care for you, cherish you, comfort you; and you shall grow strong and healthful. Never has woman had more gentle nurse than I will be to you!"

"Stop!" she cried, "I can not marry you. I am not worthy!"

He loosed her hands. "You can not marry me. You mean——?"

He was looking right down into her eyes, as if he would read her soul. She returned his look, fascinated. Again those wonderful expressions chased themselves across her face in that long gaze. Boisey was bewildered. He seemed to see terror, shame, confession, defiance, hope, recklessness, in maddening alternation.

What was she going to tell him? Chill fingers clutched on his nerves. He almost cried out to her to be silent. He did not want to know.

"Tell me one thing, it is all the question I ask, all the answer you need give"—his voice was hoarse beyond recognition. "Your virtue—your

honor, is it your own, or—my God! Dorothy, forgive me for daring to ask you.” The last words burst from him in agony, and as she saw him so unmanned, her own control returned.

“Did you think that of me?” she asked bitterly. “Did you think that I would yield up my honor *unlicensed!* Is there no other way of being unworthy? What can you know of my life in these six months? I have suffered so cruelly, I have been so shamed, so humiliated, that I am no longer myself. Everything is dead in me; even my self-respect! Everything except my love for the man who is the only man in all the world for me. Why do you want to marry me? I am not worth saving; not worth troubling about. I have been degraded by physical want, physical suffering, abject poverty. Let me go. It would be better for you. I do not want to be saved. I could make you no return. I could never love you.”

“I will make you! You must! You shall! In spite of yourself, Dorothy, you shall be saved!” His voice rang out assured, triumphant. Again her eyes rested on him; if she could only believe that! She was impressed with his power, his strength.

She knew she could trust him. The next moment she was shuddering as if with ague. She put out her hands, as if to ward off some visible foe. What was this crime she was contemplating? Was she insane?

“No! No! I can not! I must not!” she cried

out violently, her eyes dilated with fear—fear of herself, fear of temptation.

“Give me the right to care for you, Dorothy—the right to chase away these fears, which I believe exist in your imagination only. We could be married at once! I am not a poor man; I would take you away, other scenes——” He paused as her eyes, suddenly flashing with excitement, looked straight into his:

“If I could only believe that! If I could only forget! Could you make me forget everything, *everything?*” Her fingers clung to his, and he, having only the thought of *Fairfax* in his mind, answered very simply: “I would try, I would dedicate my life to the effort!”

Then his arms closed round her, and he bent to kiss her, but with a cry she freed herself, and pushed him from her.

“No! No! A thousand times No! I could not let you kiss me. I should *hate* the touch of your lips. It is impossible. I can not marry you! You do not know, and I can not tell you.”

White to the lips he stood, but by no other sign betrayed what he was suffering. Again she felt influenced by his power of self-mastery, and her passion died out. She stood a few paces from him, and they looked at each other in silence. He made no attempt to touch her, and he waited for her to speak.

“Forgive me!” she said, at last. (It had always been a good trait in her character, this readiness to own herself wrong.) “I hardly know what I

say sometimes. I wonder if I am myself. I am so changed. You do not know all I have suffered in these past months. I can not tell you! You are very good to me, and I do not hate you. Oh, you believe that, don't you? But you must see that I can never marry you——"

"Why do you say that, Dorothy? If you do not hate me, as you say, then—don't decide now. Take time to think of it. I believe I could make you happy in time. It is not natural that you should always be unhappy. Take heart, dear; you are proud; then gird on your pride as an armor, and when that man returns [he could not keep the bitterness and scorn out of his voice] let the wound be hidden so deeply that he shall never guess its existence."

The crimson flooded her face; then died away, leaving her deathly white:

"Yes! Yes!" she assented feverishly. "You are right. He must not know. I could not bear him to know. Promise me he never shall!" She laid her hands on his arm, and even with the weight of the hour upon him, he could not but shudder at the extreme selfishness of her request.

"I promise you!" he answered. "And you—you will promise me?"

What would he not give to read her thoughts, to divine the strange meaning in her eyes! It reminded him of the hunted look in the eyes of a dog he had once rescued, craving the escape it hardly dared to take. What did it mean?

"Speak to me, Dorothy!" he pleaded.

"What can I say?" She paused, and looked at him again, as if some inward force would compel the issue of words she longed, yet dreaded should escape. "I am thinking, supposing you should discover, should feel that I had done you a great wrong in marrying you, would you have strength to forgive me, or would you curse me and kill me?"

And he, still thinking only of Fairfax, replied: "I take all risks. You are surely worth it, Dorothy. But, child, how have you lived all these months?" He shuddered as he remembered the poor little array of jewels she had valued so highly.

"I lived—oh, don't question me!" she cried. "I found people to help me—I managed to live!"

Managed to live! The words hurt him.

"Poor, foolish Dorothy, you made a pretty bad job of it, didn't you? Alone with only your own mad impulses to guide you!" He did not see the strange gleam which flashed in her eyes at his words, spoken more to himself than to her. "But now we will do better, for you are not to be alone again, Dorothy!"

"No!" she assented. "You will come again to-morrow?" She gave him her hand in farewell. She even smiled as he repeated, like a schoolboy: "Yes, to-morrow! I will come again to-morrow!"

She stood where he had left her as the door closed upon him: stood with drawn brows and clasped hands: one thought rushing in on her brain, beating with heavy, persistent labor on her intelligence: "Why not do this? It means escape; for a time at least; perhaps for ever! He need never

know. It means the chance of meeting Rodney again on equal terms; the chance of revenge, perhaps, on the woman who has robbed me of him! Why not do it? Why not do it?"

It went on unceasingly like a refrain, went on till it goaded her to desperation, and in desperation compelled her to make answer.

CHAPTER XV

DO I please you? Do I look well, Rodney?" There was no doubt, no anxiety in the questioning voice, in the blue eyes.

"To me, you are always the most beautiful woman in the world, and to-night I think the world will agree with me."

Fairfax took his wife's hands and kissed them, with a courtier-like grace; then lifting her mantle from the maid's arms, he himself wrapped it round her. She was his queen, it was fitting he should serve her! His Ice-Queen, his Snow-Lady he sometimes mockingly called her, with a mockery which had a trick of leaving a chill echo of its sound behind it.

It was the beginning of September, the evening air warmer than usual, and more than once, as they drove onwards to a great reception, at which they were due, Rodney Fairfax leant forward to the open window of the brougham, as if oppressed by

the stillness of the atmosphere. His wife noticed the restless movement.

"You are nervous to-night, Rodney?"

He turned towards her: "Yes, perhaps I am! You know how I hate Society——" He stopped abruptly.

"Yes, I know! And you are making a martyr of yourself for my sake! Why do you do it? I am content to forswear it for yours! What do I care, so long as you are happy?" She leant against him; her wrap had fallen back, unneeded that late-summer night, her neck and arms gleamed dazzlingly fair and pure. How beautiful she was, this wife of his! Doubly so in the unwonted tenderness of her mood, for such speeches fell from her but rarely.

What folly it seemed for the moment, this desire of his, to show his treasure to the world! A gem of such price should surely have been kept in a casket, to which he alone held the key! Never had he idolized her more selfishly than now. It was a vulgar parade, this showing of themselves in the throng of guests, at a great house, honored though it was to be by some of the Royalties! It had appeared to him a kind of justification of his own wretched conduct, this exhibition of the cause! Who could blame him, if they saw her? And yet, after all, what madness! If she should ever hear? Sentences of Sir Geoffrey's letter flashed across his brain. That was how men, whom he would wish his wife to meet, men of honor, viewed his conduct! That was how she would judge him!

A nervous unrest fastened on him: he dropped his wife's hand and leant his face close outwards to the air. Where was Dorothy?

All he had learnt from his lawyers had been the fact of a communication received by them from another firm of lawyers, of high repute, that she was well cared for, and henceforth dead to Mr. Fairfax as "Dorothy Deming." Nothing more. Where was she?

Why did her face haunt him so persistently to-night?

"Viola," he spoke hastily, "do you care about this? Shall we go back? Shall I take you at your word? Will you give it up for me?"

But it was too late. Even as he spoke, the brougham had stopped, the door was flung open, the carpeted pavement, brilliantly lighted, faced them; and Rodney Fairfax and his wife took their place in the stream of guests, following each other in rapid succession. Even in that crowd of beautiful, well-dressed women, the face and form of Fairfax's wife attracted attention. His vague nervousness passed away, and he thrilled with pride as he noted the evident sensation she was making. And when later Royalty itself had placed its gracious seal of approval on the general opinion, Fairfax felt intoxicated by the pride of possession. And she, the cause and center of it, bore herself with such gracious and serene composure that it seemed to be a crown to her loveliness. The crush was great; Viola Fairfax was standing in an inner reception room, opening on to a conservatory, the

mass of foliage and flowers making a rich background to her figure. Already she seemed to have formed a little court. Her husband had placed himself somewhat to her right. At the moment he was feeling strangely isolated in the gay throng; no one was speaking with him. Two men advancing from the other end of the room found themselves stopped by the press of people near Mrs. Fairfax, and they were forced to stand still exactly opposite Fairfax.

"Boisey," said one, "yes, Derwent Boisey, the novelist—that's the man——"

Fairfax's thoughts were arrested with a shock. Boisey, the novelist; his old friend Boisey! Ah, he might know something of Dorothy!

"Yes, he is here to-night with his bride. I haven't seen this Mrs. Fairfax yet, that they are raving about, but Mrs. Derwent Boisey is charming enough to satisfy me! Here they come!"

Dorothy, where was she? He would seek to learn. He turned his head, and the very person of his thought stood before him! A beautiful, radiant vision she was indeed, gowned in soft, creamy satin, with a breast-knot of yellow roses and a great bouquet of the same in her hands. Just at that instant the crowd parted, and the two women and two men stood face to face.

For one brief moment, it was as if a sudden hush had fallen, a kind of breathing spell recognized only by three out of the four. Viola stood serene, unmoved, her eyes held, however, by the strange green ones of the woman facing her; eyes

which seemed to pierce through her, so fixed and brilliant were they.

The impression was evanescent, however, for her attention was almost immediately distracted by the necessity of greeting additional acquaintances. Fairfax, after the first shock of stunned surprise, made a step forward: "Boisey, old man!"—he stretched forth his hand. A chill, blank stare of non-recognition met him, and his hand dropped to his side; he flushed, then turned to follow his wife, who had strolled slowly in advance, still surrounded by her court of admirers. She had not noticed, thank Heaven! On that he dare congratulate himself.

It had been only a second of time, the pregnancy of its moment not recognized till later; then the crowd of people swayed, some onwards, some backwards, and Derwent Boisey drew close to Dorothy: "So that is over! You are glad, dear?"

Her eyes flashed strangely into his. "Yes, I am glad," she answered quietly, then turned in response to some claim upon her recognition, and met it with her brilliant smile, her childlike vivacity. Truly, this Mrs. Derwent Boisey was a very charming person, her adaptability was such sweet flattery!

Arrived at their home that night, Fairfax followed his wife up to her boudoir. Seeing his ardent desire to linger, she dismissed her maid and with her own hands pushed forward the largest chair in the room. But he preferred to stand, his back to the fireplace. He watched his wife silently,

till the growing gloom on his face arrested her attention.

"What is it, Rodney? Did not the evening please you? Was I not a success?"

"I was wondering," he answered, "how much you love me."

She laughed—a laugh, low, sweet, composed.

"Do you not know?" was all her answer; and her eyes met his tenderly, but not stirred beneath the depths.

"No, I do not." There was a new note in his voice, but it struck no responsive chord. She was a little hurt at the doubt. He moved close up to her, and took her hands almost fiercely, and raised them up to his breast. "Tell me," he said, "if you discovered me to be other than you thought, would you love me? If you heard anything to my discredit, if men looked coldly on me, and women ceased to smile, would you turn aside also—or would you stand the test? Don't shrink from me; you don't understand, you say, already your eyes are hardening! You don't know what love is, Viola!" He dropped her hands, and, all unbidden, side by side with that fair, troubled face, he seemed to see another rise—passionate, glowing, mocking; with the light of some hidden meaning hurled in one flash from eyes to eyes that night. And again he said: "You do not know what love is, Viola!" His fierceness passed away, and the pallor of his face frightened her.

"What makes you speak so strangely, Rodney? You are right, I do not understand! It is not pos-

sible you can mean what you say. You unworthy, you guilty of dishonor, you would suggest! It is cruel of you to jest with me on such a subject. It is, forgive me, horribly bad taste! I should not have thought it of you!"

She moved from him, offendedly.

"Yes," he admitted, "it was horribly bad taste, and, of course, it is all absurd, nonsense in fact; but, just for the sake of argument, suppose it true, let me see what your idea of love is! Would you stick by a man in disgrace; warm him so, in the sunshine of your love, that he would forget the coldness of the world? Or would you turn from him, as you have turned from me, now, on the mere supposition, on the mere hearing of this tale of imagination?"

She looked at him with puzzled eyes, and her hands toyed nervously with the laces at her breast: "It is such a hard question, Rodney!" She paused and looked away from him, but he had had his answer! He needed no more, although she went on speaking:

"I could not love a person whom I could not honor. Respect and love seem to go hand in hand in my nature. One can not go against one's temperament, can one, Rodney? But, of course, dear, you were only jesting, so what can it matter? And I am, oh, so tired!"

Yes, Fairfax was answered. He knew that this love of his wife for him was a delicate plant, likely to mature into fair and wholesome growth in the sunshine, but not strong enough to stand against

adverse blasts of revelation. Memory recalled that old conversation in the garden down by the Thames: was a man to be pitied or envied for never meeting his ideal, or for meeting and losing her? Now a new question added itself to the list:

Was he to be pitied or envied for having met her, and won her?

CHAPTER XVI

A WEEK later Dorothy and Boisey were seated at breakfast. The former, in the daintiest of lawn gowns, was busy pouring out the coffee, while the latter was opening his letters. An ideal scene, one might have supposed, of early wedded happiness.

"There, Derwent!" exclaimed Dorothy. "If you do not proclaim that coffee perfection, you are the most ungrateful of men!" Her smile was gay, her voice jubilant.

"It is all perfection, Dorothy!" he rejoined brightly. "You, the coffee, everything!" Dorothy beamed on him.

He had begun to recognize his wife's vanity, the sweet value of flattery!

"You dear, stupid man!" she cried, pouncing on a letter apparently unperceived by him; holding it out to him with her pretty fingers. Then dropping her voice to a melodramatic depth: "Here is a treasure, and a very pretty treasure, what will you give to redeem it?"

For all answer, he crushed fingers and letter together in his hand, then kissed the former, and retained the latter. With a mock gesture of pain she pretended he had hurt her, and kissed her own fingers, in pretty misery.

"Now open it, Derwent, and don't be absurd any more!"

"Never again!" he laughed light-heartedly.

"No, never again!" she protested solemnly, but she smiled.

"It is from Gibbon," he said, as he looked at the addressed envelope.

"About the play?"

He nodded his head: "I suppose so!" He dalled with the envelope. It was so good to see her there smiling! It was as if a cloud had been lifted from his mind. Ever since the night of that reception, when Dorothy had come face to face with Fairfax and his wife, he had felt like a prisoner released. The horrible dread of what a sudden meeting might mean had resolved itself into a commonplace passing in a crowd. All the tormenting variations of mood in which Dorothy had been engulfed seemed to have passed away. Since that night she had been apparently gay, happy, unusually kind. Not once had she relapsed into the gloomy spells, which had tried him so deeply before. She seemed deliberately trying to fascinate him. He knew that not yet did he hold her, but the chase was stimulating. He began to think that success would be his in the end. The desire to dominate her, to compel love for love, to make

the present mockery of husband and wife a reality, possessed him, and gave life a zest which made every moment of living keen. For that one week he was intoxicated with the enjoyment of a sportsman who feels the quarry a noble one, worthy of his skill and patience. He would win her. He exulted in the thought. What patience, what gentleness, what tenderness should then be hers from him! She had met this man, and how proudly she had borne herself! No tears! No lamentation! No gloom later! Surely the storm had passed, and once more the landscape of her life should lie peaceful and glorious in the sunlight.

And so he steeped himself in a Fool's Paradise. Not yet had he fathomed the rocks below the fair rolling-sea, not yet had he learnt the chameleon-like nature of the woman who bore his name.

And the smile lingered on his face as he unfolded the letter which she had given him, but gradually an interested look replaced it. The novelist was once more the keen-witted man of affairs; his face took on the likeness familiar to the outer world, with its firm, compressed lips and penetrating eyes.

Dorothy watched him lazily.

"We must run over to Paris to-day," he said, as he finished the letter. He replaced it in the envelope, so the strange light which flashed for a second in Mrs. Boisey's eyes escaped him. When he looked up at her, she was regarding him with a slightly aggrieved expression.

"Do you not like the idea?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, dear, I should like it well enough, but you forget there are one or two important engagements. It is always useless to offend people."

"Oh pshaw!" he rejoined impatiently. "We are not so tremendously important as all that! You see, Gibbon writes me that it is imperative that I come over and talk over the last act. One or two features that I laid most stress upon in the book do not adapt themselves to dramatic requirements; and, in short—I must go, Dorothy!"

The meal went on in silence for a few moments. Boisey felt annoyed at her want of sympathy. Naturally, the first dramatization of one of his works, to be produced by one of the foremost managers in London, was a matter of immense importance to him; a dramatization, too, which was being made in collaboration with one of the leading playwrights of the day, a man celebrated for his magnificent, yet tempered realism, the fineness of his detail. Indeed it was on what some would have passed over as only a trifle, that could be slurred, or ignored, that he was in Paris. But no touch was too subtle, no point too fine for Gibbon to neglect. Art and Truth! They were his watchwords.

And Boisey loved his work as keenly. It was part of his being; and all at once, as he sat there with Gibbon's letter before him, he recognized how it had been neglected of late; how the new love had thrown out the old. He felt guilty of almost a personal injury against it; and his face

grew stern with the resolve that it should be so no longer.

Having finished his breakfast, he rose from the table, and Dorothy followed him. She came up to him, putting out her hands, and, catching hold of his coat, took a button between the fingers of her left hand, and the corresponding button-hole in the right; and began fastening and unfastening them, smiling up at him the while. She had such pretty, varied gestures! Insensibly his face softened, seeing which, she beamed on him, and patted his broad chest with her slim fingers.

"There now," she cooed softly, "you are growing sensible again!" He smiled grimly. How was it possible to be "sensible" where she was concerned?

"Now, Derwent, listen to me!" She raised her right hand from his breast, and laid her forefinger on his lip, patting it gently, as she had his chest. "Don't you see how perfectly charming it will be [her voice kept in rhythm with her moving finger] for you go to Paris alone, and then when you come back, you will be so glad to see me, and it will be quite a romance!"

"And you?" he interrupted, imprisoning her hands, "how will it be with you? Will you be glad to see me? Or is it that you will be glad to get rid of me for a few days?" But no outward change showed on her face, nothing to betray the exultant leap of her heart in acquiescence.

Passing over the question, she went on with great seriousness: "Derwent, you must not let

your work suffer. Do you think that I do not see that of late, it has been neglected, and for me? Oh, Derwent, I am not worth it!" She wrenched her hands free, and with one of those startling and complete transitions of mood peculiar to her, she stood before him, an embodied tragedy. What an actress the world had lost in this woman!

"I think differently!" he rejoined gravely.

"You are wasting your life, your strength, your talent, on a will o' the wisp!"

"No, I think not! And, Dorothy, won't you try and believe that to prove the sincerity of my belief in you, I cheerfully dedicate my life, and all it holds good. Oh, my dear, give yourself a fair trial. Believe in yourself, as I believe in you."

She made no answer. What was it that had brought this shadow over the hour? It seemed to Boisey as if chill fingers were twining round his heart-strings.

"If you do not wish me to go—if you will not come with me, perhaps I can induce Gibbon to come over here," he began reluctantly.

"Oh, no! no! no!" she cried, and in her eagerness she laid her hand upon his arm. "You must not. Your work is everything! If you go over there alone, your mind will free itself from its trammels. You will devote yourself to your work. Do you think I have no pride in it? I want it to be a success. I can *see* that first night! I shall be there! I can almost *feel* now the thrill that will be mine when the applause of the critics and the audience crowns the brilliant gifts of the author!

No, Derwent, you must go. Isolate yourself for a week, two weeks, a month, if necessary, only let the work be well done."

Her voice rang with sincerity, her eyes shone with it. He felt himself carried away with the infection of her enthusiasm.

Yes, his work demanded this sacrifice of him—and she had revealed it to him. There was a wild sort of joy in the thought that she had recognized this. She must have felt some deep interest in him, to have read this, to have awakened him to what, through her fault, he had been blind to!

"Yes, you are right! But I can not bear to leave you, Dorothy. Come with me! Be my inspiration!"

"No!" she said, and her lips curved determinedly. "No, your work would suffer. You must be alone with Gibbon. With all the reputation he has of being such a brilliant playwright, I know there are some things you can teach him!"

So with sweet flattery she played upon him, and in the end he yielded. By that same evening he was in Paris, still feeling warm in his veins the intoxication of her interest.

And she? She had watched the hansom cab bearing him away, until it had turned the corner of the street; she had waited at the window, with straining eyes, for five minutes after, in order to make sure that nothing had been forgotten to bring him back. When she felt certain, she turned back into the room and walked around it, and from end to end of it, with outflung arms and uplifted head,

drawing deep breaths, like a prisoner from some dark cell suddenly plunged into sunlight.

Again she ran to the window, and looked out. Nothing to alarm her! She pressed her hands tightly on her chest, her eyes dilated. "At last!" she breathed. "At last! Alone! "Oh, blessed freedom! And yet"—with a sudden qualm of conscience—"he is so good! Poor Derwent!" It sounded like the epitaph on a forgotten tombstone.

She went up to her boudoir, and walking straight to her *escritoire*, opened it, and drew forth her writing materials. She leant her elbows on the desk, and holding her penholder at either end with her hands, closed her teeth over it in the center. Thoughts had been rushing with velocity through her brain for the last few hours, but now they resolved themselves into one, which bore down upon her with leaden weight, and the heavier it bore the closer her teeth fastened over the penholder.

"I must write, but what shall I say?" Over and over clamored the monotonous measure of her thought, yet how it burned! How it fevered her! Suddenly she flung the pen from her, so violently that it fell at the furthest end of the room. She jumped up quickly, and the chair clattered noisily over. She pressed her hands against her throbbing temples. "I think I am going mad!" she said aloud. She stood there motionless, trying to control her elusive thoughts.

"I must, see him! I must see him!" The need

her lips voiced seemed inundating her like a resistless sea.

Once again she seated herself before her desk, and drew the sheet of writing-paper towards her. She missed her pen. Then she remembered. In another moment she was on her knees in the corner of the room, seeking it. It had rolled behind a small table; she recovered it, rushed back to the desk and began to write feverishly. A page; two pages; three; then she paused, read what she had written, and with a look of wild despair, tore the sheet into innumerable pieces, and, burying her face in her hands, sat there motionless, stupefied, it seemed. When at last she raised her head, her eyes were dry, but her face was haggard, like that of a woman who had lived twenty years in those few moments. Once more she seized her pen. This time she only traced a few lines. She read them over, pressed the paper to her lips, then, inclosing it in an envelope, she addressed and sealed it. She looked at the clock. It was lunch hour.

She went through the afternoon as one in a dream. About five o'clock she rang for her maid. She was a luxury Boisey insisted upon. When the woman appeared, it was to be told that Mrs. Boisey had determined to spend a quiet evening at home, in Mr. Boisey's absence, and with gracious permission would allow the maid the privilege she herself disclaimed, that of spending the evening out. "My head aches," Mrs. Boisey continued. "I shall go out for half an hour. Have

all my things ready on my return, and as soon as you have me fixed for dinner you may go. What would she wear? Oh, her very prettiest gown, she must try and think Mr. Boisey was with her. Yes, she would wear the white silk he liked best, and no ornaments."

The maid brought her hat, veil and gloves; and with a smile (Dorothy was ever courteous to her servants!) Mrs. Boisey went out. She had learnt from the society papers where Fairfax lived. By a strange stroke of destiny, it was almost within a stone's throw of her own home. The length of a street, a turn to the left, a few yards down a straight road, that was all. She stood in front of his house. That was where he lived with that beautiful woman he called his wife. She was his wife, he loved her. Dorothy's fingers clenched themselves into her palms, unconscious of the hurt. As she looked, scanning each window hurriedly, a hansom drove up. She drew back, half turned away. Yes, it was he. He alighted, paid his fare, and ran up the steps with the supple grace she remembered so well. No need for her to shrink away. He did not look to right or left. With a quick movement he pulled forth his latch-key, opened the door and disappeared from view. A short sigh, that was almost a sob, burst from her. Her glancing eyes saw a small urchin playing on the opposite pavement. He was respectably dressed; he would excite no suspicion. She beckoned him to her. He only stared at her, then

went on with his play. She hurried across the road to him:

"My little man, do you want to earn a shilling?"

The boy stopped his game, and moving up to her, gazed at her open-eyed. "Do you see that house over there?" she asked. "Will you go over there and ring the door-bell and give this note in, and say you must wait for an answer? And if they ask 'who sent it,' say you do not know—which is true!" she muttered to herself apologetically. "Here is the shilling"—she showed him one in her palm; "you shall have it when you return. Now go and be quick."

The boy needed no second bidding. Like a shot he sped off. She watched him up the steps, saw the man-servant open the door, saw the supercilious stare at her small messenger, the importunity of the boy and the final yielding of the servant; heard the slam of the door, leaving her emissary outside, waiting. Then she thought it wiser to screen herself from observation. She signed the boy to come to her further down the street, and walked away. Her heart beat to suffocation. What would he say? Would he come? Five, ten minutes passed; fifteen! Had the boy played her a trick?

No! The shilling passed from her hand, and in its place a small square envelope showed.

She could hardly control her fingers sufficiently to open it.

"I will come."

That was all, but it made the joy of existence *seem too great to bear.*

CHAPTER XVII

HALF past eight! Mrs. Boisey surveyed herself critically in the long glass. She smiled. Excitement always became her! What excuse would he make to his wife? How could he arrange it, she wondered. The clang of the front door-bell rang through the house—then the sound of the opening door; the tones of a man's voice; his step across the hall. She leant against the wall at the further end of the room, facing the door. She was conscious, as in a dream, of the servant's voice announcing "Mr. Fairfax;" then the door softly closed, and she and Rodney Fairfax were alone.

Then she awoke. She went forward to him, both hands outstretched, her eyes radiant, with unspeakable happiness.

Fairfax fell back a space, and stood before her, amazed.

"Is it possible that you forgive me?" he said huskily.

For all answer she smiled and took the hands he did not offer.

"Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy, you overwhelm me! I came to-night because I felt it was your due. I came prepared to abase myself before you; to bear the burden of your reproach, and instead I find—this! Truly, you heap coals of fire upon my head!"

Still with that shining look in her eyes, she drew

him towards a huge divan and made him sit there by her side.

"And you forgive me?" he asked again, with incredulous humility.

"Ah, Rodney, you never understood me. If you had, it might have been different! As it was—it was not your fault and I forgive you. You have married the woman you love! Can not you, now, understand of what love is capable?"

He was too overpowered for speech. He could only hold her hand silently. There seemed something sublime in a love that could forgive so well. This was no girlish infatuation, into belief of which he had tried to cheat himself. For one moment he reeled in its depths; then he pulled himself together and said:

"Dorothy, do you know that Boisey cut me dead last night? Do you know that I have no business to be here, in this house? Do you know that nothing but my sense of obligation to you—of your right to demand apology, abasement from me, brought me here in answer to your summons? I have come to tell you this, and then to go."

"No—not to go—so soon!" and still her hands were clasped in his.

"And you—are you happy? I never dreamt of—Boisey. Is he good to you? does he love you?"

He felt like a man who, unprovoked, had kicked a confiding dog, as he saw the pained look which swept over her face, dimming its radiance. "He is too good," she said.

"Ah!" was all his response. Then, a moment later:

"Does he know?"

"Yes."

Fairfax frowned. The admission bruised his self-love. Surely she need not have told him.

Dorothy read his thoughts: "Yes, it was necessary he should know."

"And yet——" Fairfax broke off abruptly.

Dorothy smiled ironically. "And yet, you were going to say, 'He married you!' It seems strange to you, never having loved me yourself. Shall I give you the story? It might interest you, as an artist, even if as a man you can not quite understand it!"

He looked at her. Her last words were colored with a delicate sarcasm. "Tell me," he said.

"When I received your letter, it was he who brought it. He knew what it meant to me. I think I lost my senses in those days. He was so good. He saw how it was with me. And then I ran away and hid myself. I was mad, I believe; and I was afraid he would think it his duty to let you know of my whereabouts. The tale of my life in those months would fill a volume, not pleasant reading either. It came to pass in the end that I found life impossible. I said I must die. And at length, my purse empty—my heart—ah, Rodney, will you ever understand? I wanted to die, always, but I lacked the nerve, and so I tried to *drink* the courage into me. Ah, you shudder! I told you it would not be pleasant hearing! So,

when the brandy had fired my blood enough I dared to try, and he saved me. He stood by me, and at last he made me ashamed. He determined to save me from myself. Oh, he was patience itself; and, in the end, he conquered."

"And you—you, do you care for him?"

He shrank back appalled at the splendor of her wrath, as she rose to her feet and confronted him.

"How dare *you* ask me that question——"

He rose too, and they faced each other.

Then her lips opened, and slowly, as if each word hurt, she said:

"And you—you, do you love her?"

She noticed the sudden look of reverence in his eyes as he quietly answered:

"Yes, I love her."

It was as if he had run a knife in her bosom, and yet, she had always known it.

His voice, as it next sounded to her, was almost harsh in tone:

"Dorothy, why did you send for me to-night?"

She was absolutely beautiful for a moment, as she stood there, silently, before him. And he recognized it, and all his artist soul rejoiced in the perception of it.

"You have need to ask me that?" The words seemed breathed rather than spoken, yet they were quite distinct. "I sent for you because I felt I should die if I did not see you. I thirsted like one dropping in the desert, for a touch of your hand; I hungered for the sight of your face. Oh, Rodney, you talk of love, and yet it seems you will

never understand!" She stopped abruptly, her passion stunned by the look of almost horror on his face.

"I shock you!" she cried, laughing hysterically. "I seem to have that gift. I shock every one, except Mr. Boisey—and probably, were he here now, he would be so himself!"

She swept her handkerchief across her lips, and in that moment schooled her features into calm.

"Forget what I said, Rodney—and let us be friends. Surely we may claim that small privilege. I will promise not to shock you any more. Storms are necessary to clear the air; and my storm is passed now: henceforward there shall be a serene atmosphere and clear sunshine to welcome you! For you must come and see me often, Rodney. When you feel tired and weary; when things go wrong with you, as they do with the best of us at times—why, then you must feel that this is a sort of haven to you, where you may come and rest a while, sure always of sympathy and good-fellowship, as between man and man. It is the only reparation I ask of you; and I think you owe me something, Rodney!" She was smiling gravely, frankly now.

"No, no, that will be impossible—" he shook his head—"visit Derwent Boisey's wife, my old friend's wife—when he has rejected my acquaintance! No, I told you why I came to-night. I must not come again."

"But you must—you must!" she insisted. "As for Mr. Boisey, I will see that he remembers you

next time you meet—in society—” she sneered at the last words—“but here you will see me—alone; for see you I must.”

“But he, Boisey, he surely merits your first consideration? He is your husband——”

She drew herself up stiffly, and put her hand to her throat, as if it pained her, an old familiar gesture, which somehow hurt him. “Don’t speak of him as my husband. It cuts—from you!”

Fairfax looked at her, puzzled, not knowing what to say.

“But you are Mrs. Boisey!”

“Yes, in name. He knew I did not love him; he saw that left alone I should go to the devil; that I should kill myself; or drink myself to death, so to save me—he has exalted ideas as to my worth—he gave me the protection of his name, and his home, but that is the end, so far. At times I feel that I could fall down and worship him for his noble chivalry, and at others—good God! how I suffer!”

She began to walk hurriedly from one side of the room to the other; then stopped abruptly in front of Fairfax, beating her arms outwards in a gesture of fierce self-contempt:

“See how I repay him. To-night he is in Paris; gone over to consult with Gibbon, who is dramatizing his last book. He went this forenoon. He left me seemingly happy, interested in him, and then straightway I sent for you. And now I am ashamed. Go, Rodney! You are shocked! You

are sorry you came! You despise me! Oh, how wretched I am!"

She flung herself down on the lounge, and buried her face in the pillows.

Fairfax looked at her, without speaking. He was somewhat shocked, but what man is there who is not more lenient to the fault of a woman who loves than to that of a stranger! He saw her pretty shoulders heaving. What grace there was in her abandon! And it was all for him! He looked, hesitated, feeling uncomfortable and guilty, though he had no love for her. But the fact of his being there alone with her seemed to bear an outward semblance of disloyalty to Viola, his wife. What could he do? Poor, ill-disciplined Dorothy! If he could only comfort her!

So he sat down by her, and tried to draw one of her hands away from her hidden face; and, succeeding, patted it, and smoothed it like a spoilt child's; and still she kept her face hidden; which made it easier for him to say what he suddenly conceived it to be his duty to say:

"Look here, Dorothy. Are you listening?" An almost imperceptible movement of the bowed head seemed to give assent. "I think you are a foolish girl. You have a great deal to make you happy; and you turn your back on it, and, like a naughty child, long for the moon, which, if you gained possession of, you would probably find to be a hollow, worthless toy, quite inferior to the one already in your hand!" He was getting on better than he expected—she not interrupting—

and his voice gained confidence. "From what you yourself say, Boisey has behaved magnificently! One does not often hear of such chivalry in the present day. Why, then you should think that you owe him something in return. You must try, dear, to close the old volume—it was only a worthless book—and open a new one. Try and be content, Dorothy. Try and love him; surely he deserves it, and then, one of these days, you will look back on the past as a nightmare; and the world will go pleasantly with you. You will have a brilliant future; I can picture it all——"

He was arranging everything so gloriously, it was horribly disconcerting to him when she suddenly raised her head, and laughed in his face.

She clapped her hands softly. "Delightful, Rodney! What a playwright you would make! It is like taking a set of bricks, and saying: Now you have to fit in here, and you there, quite forgetting that they are all shapes and sizes, but you would insist on the round ones fitting into the squares, and vice-versa! A charming simplicity of outline, but a most clumsy workman!" Again she laughed, and pushing her hair back from her forehead, she balanced herself backwards and forwards on the lounge, looking at him, without a trace of the storm so lately raging.

"You are a very bewildering woman, Dorothy!"

"It is always the bewildering women who are interesting!" she retorted. "One wants to find out whether there are dangerous rocks lying beneath the surface, or only a smooth bed of sand.

For myself, I would prefer the stimulating possibility of dashing myself against one of those hidden rocks to the monotonous sailing over a smooth sea!"

"Ah, Dorothy, a dangerous experiment!"

"Ah, yes! But where there is danger there is fever of life, worth living!"

She looked at him with brilliant eyes that dived right down into his, with the old remembered trick, ever seeking, never finding.

All at once the memory of that moonlight night down by the Thames flashed over him, and he knew it was best for him to go.

She made no effort to detain him—only when he had left her, a triumphant smile lighted her face, for a moment, into a wild, evil kind of beauty.

CHAPTER XVIII

"**W**HERE have you been, dear? Is your head better?" asked Mrs. Fairfax sleepily. She was stretched out full length on her lounge, clad in a white wrapper, which in its fluffiness of lace at neck and wrist seemed to fold her about, like sea-foam.

How pure and fair in her beauty was this wife of his! What would he not give for the power to move her as he could that other woman. He kissed her, and she smiled back at him with the careless, sleepy grace of a child.

Ignoring her question—he seemed to have forgotten that it required an answer—he said:

“Have you enjoyed yourself to-night, Viola? Tell me about your evening.”

“I enjoyed it, yes!” she answered, but there was no enthusiasm in her way of speaking, only the serene acceptance of good which was characteristic of her. “I renewed an old acquaintance to-night—Mrs. Baldwin. She was a great friend of my mother. She was there with her daughters. They are charming people! They have promised to call here to-morrow. I should like you to meet them, Rodney.”

The Baldwins! Charming people! The words recurred to him persistently. Where had he heard them before? Used, too, in the same connection?

“I took a strong fancy to the elder girl, Violet,” went on his wife.

Violet Baldwin! Had he ever met her? The name was so familiar. And then it all came back to him. He remembered Dorothy’s description.

Then these were her acquaintances. These people knew, and they were coming to call on his wife to-morrow! It was a horrible thought. He passed his hand across his brow, perplexed. And yet, after all, what had he done—only what numberless men had done before him. Made a mistake—jilted one woman because he loved another! Some women were not unmerciful to these faults, were they the cause. He looked at his wife, and knew that she would not be as one of those! His sensitive nature recoiled from that ugly word “dis-

honor," but he knew that even as Sir Geoffrey had seen it, so would she. He turned aside in a sudden agony. In the acquaintance of the Baldwins he perceived a sword of Damocles. Women are so indiscreet, he thought. One could never tell what slight thing might precipitate a revelation, a revelation which, instinct warned him, they could assuredly make.

"What is the matter, Rodney? Is your head still aching?"

"Yes," he assented wearily. This specter of the past, suddenly confronting him, was a hideous thing. In vain he tried to argue to himself that it was a commonplace affair enough. Hundreds of men had done likewise, and lived with an easy conscience. Why had he come to this hateful London? Why had the vanity of possession seized him, the desire to show to the world the treasure he had won? These and many similar questions troubled him through the restless night hours. But with the clear light of morning, he felt rather ashamed of his fears. In the stillness and darkness, when the world sleeps, the shadows of one's doubts assume tangible shape: one stands alone, as it were, face to face with them, without possibility of escape; and so compressed and focused, they loom gigantic, overwhelming.

And, after all, the Baldwins' visit passed over pleasantly enough. He was present, and never once did the tide of conversation trespass on the dangerous quicksand of the past. He found himself quite attracted by the personality of Violet.

“A singularly pure, high-strung nature!” he remarked, later, to his wife, “with decided possibilities!”

After the Baldwins had left, he realized the tension that had been on his nerves. He felt the need of air. Outside the sky was overcast, the atmosphere damp, and rather chilly, but he lifted his head to it gratefully.

Bah! How he hated the customs of conventionality; these inane conversations in a drawing-room, where on one side existed the thought: how long will they think it necessary to stay?—and on the other—how soon can we bring our visit to a close?

Why had he permitted Viola to be dragged down into the net of these social nuisances!

Was it his desire for something wilder, freer, that led him insensibly to the door of Mrs. Boisey’s house? He felt almost a shock as he found himself ringing the bell. Was it too late to retreat? he suddenly wondered. The door opened. Mrs. Boisey was at home.

And somehow, it became a habit with him, in the following days, to drop in on her between the close of the afternoon and dinner.

And always then he was sure of finding her alone.

“It rests me just to be with you!” he would say, feeling grateful for the rare tact which had taught her to avoid all personal subjects; which had subdued any excitement of manner, lulling him into a false sense of security. More rarely, each day, was he attacked by the feeling of trea-

son and disquiet which had first assailed him. Surely there could be no danger in this quiet, friendly intercourse, and surely something was due to him for his magnanimity in sacrificing himself so constantly on the altar of his wife's ever increasing social obligations.

It was with quite an unpleasant sensation he heard from Dorothy, two weeks later, that Derwent Boisey might return at any moment. But she, reading his thought, and exulting in it, said: "It will make no difference at present. The manuscript has been in the hands of Bellfield for the last ten days, all but the last act; that Mr. Boisey and Gibbon bring with them. Rehearsals began this week. The opening night is only three weeks from to-day, and, naturally, Mr. Boisey will be at the theater the greater part of each day. I hope the play will make a hit. It is, I think, very strong, and he has put heart and soul into it!" Her eyes kindled, her tone was enthusiastic.

"You speak as if you, too, had put heart into it—and yet you say you do not care for the author!" He spoke with a certain resentment, which she was quick to notice, and which thrilled her with pleasure.

"Can't you give me credit for a little generosity of feeling—a little intelligence? Surely I may have an intellectual pride in the *work*, if I have no love for the *man*!"

Fairfax laughed idly: "Well, so long as you do not love him——" He stopped, aghast! Whither was he drifting? And what mattered it to him

whether she loved Boisey or not? What a tiresome trick the question had of recurring at intervals!

The next day brought Derwent Boisey home. Dorothy's prognostication proved true. Rehearsals claimed all his time, from ten in the morning till five and six at night. Then on his return from the theater each evening, what a radiant vision of womanhood greeted him! Never had Dorothy been more brilliant, more sympathetic, it seemed to him. He never noticed with what strange persistency she kept the conversation on the absorbing topic of the moment—the forthcoming production. It flattered him too much, this intelligent interest in his work, for him to probe the reason. There was something delightfully intimate in this union of interest, and he himself was at the moment too wrapped up in his work, too fatigued with the long hours of tension at the Sheridan Theater, to stop to analyze the attitude of his wife.

"Ah, Dorothy," he said, a few days before the eventful Monday, "this play business claims too much of my time; but, when Monday is over, when its fate is decided, things shall be different. We will take a holiday together, dear; the existing order of things shall be changed!" He looked at her with anticipatory pleasure, which for the moment conquered the physical weariness that for the past few days had shown so plainly in his face.

She met his eyes, and all at once her own shadowed, and dropped.

"Yes, we will change the existing order of things. It will probably be necessary. We can not

go on like this. I think, sometimes, I shall go mad!"

He looked at her as if he could not believe his ears. The tone of her voice was flat, hopeless; it was as if she was wrapped in a sudden gloom, tangible, exuding a chill, which crept into his very marrow.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and his own voice sounded strange to him. An expression of remorse showed in her face.

"Nothing! Forget that I spoke as I did. It was wrong. I am sorry."

"I can't forget it. You should not speak such words if they have no meaning. They hurt. What do you mean, Dorothy? Has anything happened in my absence to disturb you—Fairfax——?"

"Oh no, no, no!" she disclaimed eagerly, but her eyes did not meet his.

"Have you seen him, Dorothy? What is it? Don't let us make any new mistakes."

She felt a sudden pity for the weary look, which made his face all at once look gray and old. "Yes, I have seen him. He has been here——" Boisey started. "Now don't be vexed, Derwent. Surely it is carrying out your own desire, that I should show him how little it signifies to me now, that I can receive him here, in my own house, as I would any ordinary acquaintance!"

"And he dared intrude himself here; he had the temerity, the insolence to enter my house after my refusal to recognize him! And you received him! Dorothy, Dorothy, what am I to think of

you?—or—” his face lightened momentarily—
“or was it possible that his wife desired to meet
you? Did Mrs. Fairfax accompany her husband?”

Dorothy laughed in his face: “Now, you dear, stupid novelist, how little you really know! Can’t you understand that he would be afraid, knowing something of your Dorothy’s sudden impulses? He would hardly like his wife to know how abominably he had treated one woman! No—she has not been. And furthermore, she will not. I would not receive her.” Her eyes flashed, and for one second of time Boisey saw hot hatred holding carnival in their depths. He felt a premonition of coming evil.

“You have something on your mind, Dorothy; something you wish to tell me. Make me your father confessor,” he said with a forced laugh, “and together, perhaps, we can lift the burden of thought, and——” He was stopped by the pressure of her fingers on his lips.

“No! No, sir! I decline! You must not have your mind torn in two directions. For the present, let us remember—‘the play’s the thing.’ I absolutely decline to play second fiddle to any one, or anything. Therefore let me and my woes wait until after Monday. Perhaps by that time I shall have forgotten what they are!”

The lightness of her tone was forced. Boisey was haunted at intervals by the presentiment of evil, by doubt of Dorothy, suspicion. He surprised, more than once, an expression of contrition and

shame in her eyes. What was it he was to learn? He was never sure of her; never felt he could rely on her sincerity of reform. Good God! was it possible that in his absence she had slipped back and yielded to the old temptation? What with the natural anxiety he felt as to the success of the play, and the haunting dread as to the meaning of Dorothy's strange and constantly recurring words, Boisey felt himself trembling on the verge of some illness, threatened with an attack of nervous prostration. "We must get away for a time as soon as this is over," he said to himself. He arranged it all in his own mind: although the season would be late they would take a couple of weeks' rest down in some quaint Cornish fishing village, where the great swell of the Atlantic would drive out all morbid, petty thoughts; for in daily communion with Nature's mighty truths, surely there could be no place for small and vulgar ideas. Dorothy's mind should be cleared and braced; and then would begin a healthier, stronger life for both. And so, in stray moments of leisure, he dreamed.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was all over, and it had proved an artistic triumph for both authors and actors. Leaning back in his brougham, Dorothy by his side, as they were driven to their home, after the theater, Boisey could see it all over again. In the stalls had been all the familiar critics, first-

nighters, and some of the social high lights; and approval had poured forth in a steady, generous stream from the end of the first act to the fall of the curtain. Then, as a seal, crowning the evening's success, had come the command to the royal box, where a few gracious words from the King and Queen had made both Gibbon and himself feel that, for the evening at least, the world was a pleasant place after all.

And Dorothy—what an absorbing interest she had taken in the performance. What a brilliant appearance she had made! What a childlike enthusiasm she had displayed, blended with a woman's intelligent appreciation of all the best points and situations.

As he entered his home, Boisey felt it had been the proudest day of his career. The success of the evening opened out a new field for his talents.

There was but one wish ungratified, and now that should be, must be his.

A few moments later they sat at supper. He almost laughed aloud, as he thought how many men that evening had envied him the possession of his charming wife, as much, if not more, than his intellectual success. What a mockery it was! But it should not remain so. How many would credit the truth and if they did, would he be fool or hero in their eyes? He let her talk all through the supper, with scarce an interruption. So busy was he with his own thoughts and desires, that he hardly noticed that she kept to one topic only, the evening's success—the play, the players, the audience.

Had he seen the Baldwins? They were in the second row of the stalls. Had he noticed how charming Violet was looking! Sir Geoffrey Carstairs was seated next to her. They seemed to be quite devoted to each other—but that was only because she—Dorothy—was out of his reach. And so she rattled on, a feverish excitement in eyes, voice, manner. And with each moment the blood flowed more hotly in his veins; the fever of possession had seized him. This woman of many moods, so gay, so bewitching to-night, was his by right. She bore his name, and he wanted her for his own. Every fiber of his being was calling out his need. She should be the crowning glory of this night of triumph. He looked at her. She had risen from her seat, her glass of champagne poised on its way to her lips, and she was giving utterance to a prettily worded toast to his success.

He watched her for a moment, breathless, fascinated; then, as she drained her glass and replaced it on the table, making him a sweeping curtsey as she did so, he rose and caught her by the waist.

“Dorothy, you witch! You sorceress! You have charmed my senses away! I love you! I want you for my wife—my wife! Heart-beat for heart-beat—love for love!”

Ten years of his age seemed to fall from him; the power and fire of youth flashed in his eye, rang in his voice! But with angry movements Dorothy was fighting to free herself from his embrace, uttering quick, short cries; for the first time in their acquaintance, he did not yield. He felt the

strength of a god. She was his, he would have her! He took no more heed of the blows her little clenched fists rained against him, than if they had been a baby's. Indeed he did not feel them. With one arm firmly clasped around her waist, he held her—amused, for the moment, by her fierce yet futile resistance. Then with the other arm about her neck, he tilted her head back:

"It is no use, Dorothy. You may as well give in, for win you I will!" and then he kissed her.

"I hate you! Oh, how I hate you!" she cried. "I will never forgive you, never! You had no right——"

"No right?" he interrupted, the passion light burning fiercely in his eyes. His arms fell away from her for a moment, so sure was he of his power to enforce his right. There was no mistaking the vindictiveness of her expression; her eyes were blazing, her hands clenched. She looked as if she could kill him where he stood.

"No right?" he repeated. "You forget the law has given me a husband's right, which I have never enforced, but to-night—ah, Dorothy, I want you, my wife—my wife!" His voice was ringing louder again, he came a step nearer. "It is my right, why should I not claim it? and by Heaven! I do!"

He would have seized her in his arms, but she laughed—a laugh which had a devil of mockery in it: "Your right?"—again that horrid laugh. "Your right? Poor fool! You have no right——"

He caught her by the wrists: "What do you mean? This is no time for jesting!"

He gripped her flesh so fiercely she winced with the pain.

"I mean that you have no right, that you are not my husband. I have deceived you."

He released her hands, and fell back a step or two; then stood leaning heavily, with both hands on the table. He could not speak at once; the blow was too heavy. His breath came with difficulty. He could only look at her with horror—amazement.

She was white to the lips, now that the plunge had been taken. She felt giddy, sick. She stepped to the table, and pouring out a glass of champagne drained it at one draught; then with a quick movement refilled it, but now Boisey awoke from his stupor.

He caught her hand as she brought the glass to her lips, and with a jerk it fell, and lay shivered in fragments between them.

"Not that! While I have any power left!" and she, looking at his white, set face, was seized with an overwhelming sense of shame and remorse. "At least," he continued, "I have the right to know how I have been tricked and duped. Let me hear the story. It won't be pleasant in the telling, probably, nor in the hearing."

He motioned her to be seated, while he dropped into the chair he had just vacated at the table, shading his eyes with his hand, while he listened to the low monotony of her voice, as she began.

"No, it is not pleasant—you are right. But how

do you think I lived in those months before you found me? You remember my sending for you, and asking you to get money for me on my mother's jewels? How you must have laughed! I soon found out how little they were worth. I showed them to a person—the nephew of my first landlady—and he also pretended to believe them valuable.

“He was outwardly a gentleman; his aunt, though she took in lodgers, was a gentlewoman. Well, he put off from day to day getting me the money I needed, and yet day by day he came, and I saw that I attracted him.

“I tried to get work. I had no references; I had no certificates of merit; I had no money to register at agencies, for I did not know such things were till my little resources were gone. The one or two I visited allowed me to see that I was not an eligible person, for all those reasons.

“I tried the shops, but I knew nothing of any business—in short I had no market value. I received only contempt, ridicule or insult in my efforts! Finally I succeeded in obtaining work at a factory of the cheapest, meanest kind—not even bread and cheese did it mean—the associations—ah! I can't think of it—and even there, because I took as an insult what the other girls coveted as a compliment, I was forced to leave.

“I was reckless, penniless, dependent, and yet—I did not want to die—then! I hungered to see Rodney once more. And this man that I speak of hunted me day after day, week after week. He

lent me money, unknown to his aunt—my landlady—to enable me to keep my lodging, to pay for food. I was in his power. Don't be too hard on me, for I was desperate, heartsick, alone!"

"But why did you not send for us—for Geoffrey and me—we were friends——"

"Oh, my pride was sorely hurt. I thought of it—yes, many times, but I could not, I could not! I thought Rodney would hear of it all; his—his—wife, Mrs. Fairfax," her hand went to her throat with the old trick of suffering, "she would hear, and that I could not bear—that woman despise me—no, I would have died first!" Her voice, which had risen into momentary power, sank again. "Then this man, seeing how driven I was by poverty and hunger, how unused I was to it, took me out to dinners, to suppers—how cunningly he waited his time, till I was too worn to resist! I went with him. I deluded myself. I said I would get strong again. Oh, how can I tell you—he gave me wine, oftenest champagne, and more than once I believe he drugged it. I seemed to promise in the evening what I could not remember in the morning; and in the end, I married him. He knew there was no other way to possess me, and the fire burnt fiercely then. I told you I would never part with my honor unlicensed, you remember? Oh yes, I was legally married. I went through it all as in a dream, half stupefied, I can see now, by drugs and wine.

"We went to Brighton for our honeymoon—in forty-eight hours I loathed him. I could have

killed him sometimes. Outwardly, I have said, he was a gentleman! But inwardly he was a beast—a vulgar, sensual beast! At the end of a month, all his passion dead, he reciprocated my feelings. He hated me. He knew that I despised him; that I abhorred the animal I was chained to—I did not spare him the truth—and so at the end of that month, that was four months ago, he gave me twenty pounds, and told me to go to the devil or kill myself. I followed his advice. I had tried the former, and when my money was gone I was going to fulfil it, when you stopped me. It was a mistake! You see I knew best.”

“A mistake! Yes!” He lifted his hand from his eyes and looked at her. “My God! What have you done?” he cried.

Suddenly she flung herself down on her knees before him, and burst into passionate weeping: “Forgive me! Forgive me! I swear I fought against the temptation to yield to you. And then it seemed such a chance. I thought, ‘He is so good; he alone can save me. He need never know! What harm can it do?’ It seemed to me as if Heaven willed that I should be saved from myself. I knew there were possibilities of good in me, and so I gave way.”

“When you entered upon this experiment, did it ever occur to you that I might not always be able to preserve the same altitude towards you, that some such occasion as to-night might arise? Had you not counted on the risk you were run-

ning? Did you forget your womanhood, my manhood?"

"No," she interrupted, "I thought of it all."

"Then why," he broke in bitterly, "did you not carry on the game you had begun? What made it necessary for you to tell me what you had reckoned on my never learning, since, as you say, your *husband* was as glad to be rid of you as you of him!"

"There is some devil in me, I believe, Derwent. This is not all. When you were away, I sent for Rodney Fairfax——"

Boisey rose from his chair, and she struggled up with him.

"Ah, I thought so—I thought so! You have lied to me, tricked me, cheated me! Had you not done evil enough?" he asked, an unspeakable anger against this woman, who had wrecked his happiness, growing within him.

"Yes, I have done all that—but I loved him, Derwent. I was dying for the sight of him——"

"And he came—of course——" put in Boisey ironically.

"Yes, he came—but not as you think. He has no thought of love for me——" The aching misery in her tone made itself felt, even in the stricken, numbed brain of the man. "Derwent, don't think I have fallen so low that I can not appreciate all your generosity to me. I realize the evil I have done. I was mad, I think. And you—you were so determined on my salvation—and I had resolved to play my part well, to be a wife to you

when you demanded. Yes, I had schooled myself. I was growing at times content, and then you ask me, Why did I tell you to-night! Because—before—I had not seen Rodney Fairfax again! I had thought it possible in time to deaden the old feeling; had thought it possible, as I have said, to be your wife in more than name. I recognized it as your right. I knew the struggle for you. I honored it and you. But—oh, since I have seen him, spoken with him—I know my love for him can never die. I adore him! I think no woman ever loved so madly as I—and so it became impossible to grant what you desired to-night. Your very touch made me wild. There is only one man in the world for me, whose embrace I long for, and he does not love me. The only way to stop you was to tell the truth.”

For one horrible moment Boisey felt compelled to lay violent hands upon her; to slay the falsehood and deceit which had wrought such havoc. And as they stood there, the man breathing with difficulty, his eyes red with that murderous impulse, Dorothy knew that she stood face to face with Death. His hands gripped her shoulders, and they seemed to carry the weight of iron; his breath fanned her cheek with gusty heat. Slowly she rocked beneath that heavy clasp; her vital force felt as if shrinking in a deathly sickness; she made no resistance, she was paralyzed with physical terror, and for the first time her spirit quailed before his. Stealthily one of his hands moved to her throat, the warm softness of her skin inflamed his

passion again: "I will not kill you—I will possess you——" His voice, his eyes, his whole aspect became ferocious. "I will not be cheated of everything—for this one night you shall be mine!" He bent his lips to the little hollow between throat and shoulder, and kissed her half a dozen times with violence.

She resisted him with all her puny strength. "Kill me," she moaned; "kill me—I would die a thousand times rather—kill me—it will be a mercy." With a sudden lithe movement of her body she twisted herself free, and rushing to the table picked up a steel knife. "I will save you the trouble!" she screamed. Her action brought Boisey to his senses. Hardly had the point touched her, for, as she turned the blade towards her breast, her hand shook; then it was wrenched from her grasp and flung to the farthest corner of the room—and Boisey, white, quivering with revulsion of feeling, the death-throe of his passion, pointed to the door:

"Leave me, Dorothy—go to your own room."

CHAPTER XX

FOR a while after she left him, it seemed to Boisey that his brain would give way. This thing that had befallen him was so hideous, so undreamed of. What had he done, he cried aloud, to deserve it? It was like a nightmare. Dorothy, so young, so outwardly refined,

such a vision of pretty, gracious womanhood, what was she? He stood appalled at the egotism of such a love as hers, which walked roughshod over human happiness, ruthlessly trampling down all moral responsibilities. Was she absolutely without the moral sense? And after all, what is the moral sense? Is it not elastic enough to feed the need of different natures, and arrange itself accordingly? No, it was the spiritual sense that was wanting—the thought wandered vaguely across his confused brain—and yet, there had been glimpses of that same sense, that restraining power at rare intervals, with her. He was too crushed to analyze. His heart was so sore, his whole being in revolt against the monstrous selfishness of the woman, little more than a girl in years; and then the difficulty of it all—the scandal. Her words, "Let me go to the devil!" kept recurring with a persistency that bid fair to drive him mad.

What should he do? Should he take her at her word, let her have her desire? The world would not condemn him. Why should he think of her; when had she ever considered him?

Let her go! Give her money to care for her bodily needs, and let her find some other man to fool. Send her back to her whilom guardian. Let him have the responsibility of her. She would not object. He laughed a short, bitter laugh. There was a grim, ugly humor in the idea, which amused him.

And so through the night hours the devils of

hate, rage, disappointed passion, and lust of revenge held carnival in his heart, but towards the dawn his better nature asserted itself, insisted on a hearing, and finally made out such a clear case for itself that all the doubts and difficulties cleared away, and Derwent Boisey resolved on a line of conduct that hereafter he adhered to. Worn out by the struggles of those silent hours, he flung himself, dressed as he was, on the lounge, and fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

It was late when he awoke, nearly eleven o'clock. Ringing the bell, he ordered tea to be brought to him there, then going up to his room, he got out of his evening clothes, and after a cold bath, and redressing, he felt strengthened and refreshed. The tea helped him. After he had finished his repast, he rang the bell again, and on the entrance of the servant said: "Will you ask Mrs. Boisey if she can spare me a little time?" He spoke in his usual manner, and the servant suspected nothing amiss.

Five minutes later Dorothy entered. It was easy to see sleep had not visited her during the hours since they parted.

Boisey spoke without looking at her first, though he was keenly alive to her presence.

"Be seated," he said, pointing to a chair at one side of the table, while he seated himself facing her. And then he noticed how white, and haggard, and old she looked.

"What are you going to do?" she asked nervously. The situation was horrible, the tension un-

bearable in the face of his calm, though instinct told her at what cost that calm had been won.

"I have thought out a plan which I believe will be best. It has not been easy to arrive at a conclusion; but I have decided that we must go away, leave London——"

"We!" she interrupted, as if doubting she heard aright.

"Yes, we!" he pursued in an even, passionless voice. "We will go to America. We can not remain here. You yourself must see this. By going away we shall avoid scandal, and simply arouse a nine days' wonder. The world will remain in ignorance of the truth, and will soon forget us."

"But you," she interrupted; "I do not understand. You are willing to let things be as they are—you speak as if I were your wife."

"No, you have not heard all I have to say. My wife you can never be: but I can not leave you to yourself. I dare not leave you here alone. We can not live together—a lie; but I do not mean to let the devil have you, if I can help it. So the only way, it appears to me, is to leave the world where we are known, and begin our lives again, apart, but not alone, in some other city, where I can help you, watch over you, and keep you from yourself, Dorothy!"

She had listened, breathless. "And you—you will do this for me? after the evil I have wrought? You must not! You shall not! I will not accept such a sacrifice. Think of last night—your career!"

"I have thought of it. Good God! what have I not thought of?"

For that one moment Dorothy had a glimpse of the depths through which his soul had struggled to the light.

"But what I say is best. My career I can take up again, after a while, when I have regained desire and power. The world will look upon our flight as an eccentricity of genius," he laughed bitterly. "If it knew the truth, what would be your position, your fate? Would you be recognized by any of the crowd that now seeks the acquaintance of Mrs. Derwent Boisey? Would they help you? Would any woman give you sympathy, aid you to conquer yourself, and your misfortunes? Would the men, who surround you now with flattery and adulation, give you anything but that same flattery, with the accompaniment of insult and lust? You know it all. And so I say that you shall find one helper, who will not turn his back on you in your need. And all I ask is that you fight a battle with yourself, Dorothy—fight it morning, noon, and night, and pray God to help you."

He turned aside. He was deeply moved. He realized to the full what he was giving up. But he could not cast her forth to the bitter mercies of a world only too ready to give a woman who had erred another push on the downward path.

Her voice low and shaken, she said: "You noble fool, why do you do this for me? I am not worthy!"

He pushed the hair back wearily from his forehead as he returned her gaze. Not worthy—perhaps not! Well, he could only try. So, doggedly, he replied:

“Time alone will prove whether I am right or wrong, a fool or not. And it rests with yourself, Dorothy. Do you realize that it is truly a turning-point in your life? The chance is given you. Of your own free will, you can accept or reject it.”

Did she realize what it meant—another chance! Did she ever think how many women less guilty than she had lived a living death, or else been driven in despair, to suicide, for want of that “other chance?”

Just now she was humbled, penitent, though it is doubtful if she ever realized her position, and the crime of which she had been guilty, as keenly as a woman of finer spiritual and moral temperament might. Her passionate infatuation for Rodney Fairfax swamped all other senses. She lived in and for that love, with an absolute disregard of all responsibilities, moral or legal. Rightly directed, this intense power of loving might have lifted her to heights sublime. As it was, it hung like a pall over her soul—all was darkness, save where Fairfax was.

Often the thought of her mother's death-bed occurred to her. She felt as if the curse of the dead Lenore, so nearly spoken, had really fallen. It sometimes seemed to her as if it had been her own soul which had winged its flight that night, and

that the tortured, unsatisfied soul of the mother had taken its place.

She certainly had left her unloved child the heritage of a similar temperament, undisciplined, ruled only by its own passionate impulses.

Now one of those impulses urged her to try and be worthy of the sacrifice that was to be made for her.

"Tell me what you want me to do, and I will try and carry out your desires." She spoke quite humbly, and the light of sincerity shone in her eyes.

"I shall at once begin my preparations. It will probably be two weeks before we can sail. During that time you will simply go on playing your part. It will not be arduous. It is not a new rôle. I have only one request to make, and that is—that you do not receive Mr. Fairfax here again." The tone in which he made his "request" told her it was equivalent to a command. She bowed her head in mute assent. "Of course, I have no right to control your actions. You are, as I have said, a free agent. Therefore, if you choose to meet him elsewhere, you can do so. Only I leave it to your sense of honor whether it be right to do so!"

Dorothy understood. This was, then, her ordeal. For the moment she felt herself strung up to a pitch of heroism. She would place herself upon an equal plane of self-sacrifice with Derwent Boisey. Her mood was exaltè; she felt a glow of self-approval warming the poor vanity which had

been trailing so sadly in the dust; and with earnest, shining eyes, she said:-

"Derwent, I understand you, and although it is but a poor return for all you are doing for me, I will do this thing for you. I will not see Rodney Fairfax. I will see that he is not admitted here, and elsewhere I will not seek him."

"Thank you, Dorothy," Boisey said.

"It is only a beginning," she went on; "but perhaps, by and by I shall get stronger in being good, and then you will approve of me, won't you?" She spoke almost lightly, with one of her quick transitions of mood. She walked to the door, on reaching which she turned and smiled at him; then softly closing it behind her, left him alone.

Heavens! How hard this thing had been! He leant back in his chair, feeling too weary to move, almost to think. And hard as it was now, he realized that it would be harder still in the future.

In that hour of physical exhaustion he almost shrank from the task he had set himself. This woman could never be anything to him, not even his mistress. Honor forbade even the thought. He had charged himself with her welfare. But suppose the passionate infatuation of the past few days should come to life again under the altered circumstances—how then? He put the thought away from him with horror. He recognized the mercurial temperament of this woman; she was a human chameleon.

He thought he saw possibility of good in her,

and he felt it his duty to try and awaken the soul struggling through such a mass of undisciplined matter. It was a hard position for a man to face. Had she been less absolutely friendless, had there been any one she could turn to in her need; but, save himself, who was there? He went over the whole ground again. He wanted to avoid any possible mistake. If he had allowed the truth to transpire in London; if there had been an immediate separation, she, the woman, would have been branded as an outcast, liable at any moment to become subject to the man who had a lawful claim upon her, and who, from further revelations on Dorothy's part, he knew to be a brute, with whom she could not live. And, furthermore, he knew that under those circumstances she would kill herself. That was one contingency that faced him. There was another equally terrible. She might become the mistress of Rodney Fairfax. Alone, friendless, what more natural than that she should seek the protection of the man she loved with such soul-wrecking abandon—and Fairfax was only human. He might in a moment of madness forget his fair, young wife. But when he awoke from that moment, would it not be likely that he would hate the cause of his madness? Then woe to him and to her! For instinct told Boisey that under those circumstances Dorothy would bring death to Fairfax and herself. Again—if she found strength of will to live her life alone—to conquer all the wayward impulses, how long would it last, for never any woman more alone

than she. It would be condemning her to a living death, and death or madness would ensue. No! Going over it dispassionately, he could clearly see that none of those ways lay open to him, or to her. He could not help her if they remained in England. The truth would have to be told then, and the world would believe that the woman it had received as his wife, flattered and admired, was his mistress. The position would be impossible for him and for her. By going to America, to New York, he thought, it would be considered that overwork necessitated complete change of scene and living. That was easily arranged. Once there, he could keep in touch with Gibbon, and with his publishers; and, if necessary, he could run across to arrange matters with either party, and, by degrees, the social world would have forgotten them; and for his literary and business connections, his private life had no interest keen enough to keep alive without food to feed on. He would take their passages in different names. She should resume her maiden name, and by that she would be known in future, once away from London. He would find her a suitable home, and then locate himself in some bachelor apartment, or hotel, within convenient distance. Further than that, he did not go for the present.

CHAPTER XXI

THREE weeks later Mr. Derwent and Miss Deming were fellow passengers on the steamship "Massachusetts" of the Atlantic Transport Line.

Boisey had chosen it in preference to one of the sweller boats, as being less likely to be crowded, thus reducing the possibility of meeting undesired acquaintances. Besides, the season of the year favored him. It was now November, and most of the people he knew were either thinking of the Riviera or the English watering-places on the southern coast, certainly not of a trip to "the States." Now that it was all over, he felt the reaction from the harassing cares of the past three weeks. The man was exhausted, mentally and physically; and welcomed gratefully the thought that for ten days or so no new care from the outside world could touch him.

As he looked at the face of his companion he understood she, too, had suffered. Pale, haggard, with large, miserable eyes, she looked at least thirty, and her voice, when she spoke, which was not often—to him—was aged, too. He caught her looking at him sometimes with an expression of bitter resentment, which struck him as needing explanation later.

Now that they were really started on their voyage, with nothing but the stretch of waters round them, calm at present, with a stupendous mono-

tony, restful to him, maddening to her, her mood seemed to change altogether. Instead of her benefactor, he now appeared to her as her enemy. She had been true to her word. She had not seen Fairfax. She had not even written to him. But now that it was over, she was conscious of an ever growing anger towards this man, who had demanded such a sacrifice from her. How she hated him! How she hated everything, and everybody, save herself and Rodney! Now that each day was taking her further from him, the fever of longing to see him grew until it nearly consumed her; and once she came near ending it all. The swelling breast of the ocean in the dusky light of night, looked so inviting—why not let it cradle her? She was so tired—if she could but sleep—sleep forever! An impulse forward—an outward gesture of despair! That was all! How futile! How she raged against that ever watchful care! “Will you always be my jailer?” she asked him fiercely. All the pent-up resentment of the seven days already passed on the steamer burst forth in a torrent of hysteric abuse. In vain Boisey tried to soothe her. As vain were it to try and allay the tempest of the ocean with a wineglassful of oil! She locked herself in her stateroom, and did not appear again on deck until the following evening. She looked horribly ill; and barely answered Boisey when he spoke to her . . . Well, he had set himself the task. If it proved harder than he thought for, he must find still more courage wherewith to tackle it. Nothing could exceed his

patience, his gentleness, yet both tempered with a dignity which prevented either from degenerating into weakness. So they landed, and the new life began.

He secured two large adjoining rooms for Dorothy in a "furnished room house" in Thirty-fourth Street, close to Sixth Avenue and Broadway. For himself he had a large front room in the same street a block further west. Dorothy would not hear of a boarding-house for herself. She took her breakfast each morning at a near-by restaurant, and every evening she and Boisey dined together at some hotel or restaurant.

Boisey did not know that the first mail steamer out of New York after their arrival carried a long missive from Dorothy to Fairfax. It was easy enough to keep him in ignorance of this treachery, owing to the fact that they resided in different houses, and for a long time thereafter Boisey had no cognizance that a system of regular correspondence had been inaugurated between the two, as a sequence to that first letter.

Meantime Dorothy improved outwardly in health and spirit. The Bohemianism of their life suited her admirably. She regained her poise. The elasticity of her temperament reasserted itself, and Boisey would sometimes be astonished at the gaiety of her mood. But always a phase of especial brilliancy and good temper would be followed by one of silence and sullenness; or worse still, violent hysterical outbursts. It was a hard and wearing life for the man. Sometimes his

patience would give out, and he would feel inclined to echo the sentiments of that other man: "Take twenty pounds and go to the devil." But Dorothy seemed always to have an instinct telling her when to stop. And then nothing could be more fascinating, more repentant than she. With what tact she calmed the storm, acknowledging her faults, promising reformation, wheedling the man into new promises for the future, rousing the old infatuation to serve her own ends. And then in those periods he suffered horribly, for never once did he yield to the temptation of transgressing on the lines he had laid down for himself. But more than once he was sorely tempted to flee from it all, confessing it too hard; but then she would show herself so sweetly penitent, so anxious to be more worthy, that he would feel renewed the sense of obligation to try and save her from herself, to rouse her to a higher perception of the responsibility of her life.

And so the months wore on, finding him sometimes utterly discouraged and exhausted, but still with hope renewed from time to time, by glimpses of her better nature. She would have periods of concentrated, serious effort; of keen intellectual work. She would startle him sometimes with the forceful directness of her criticism. Her taste in literature was refined and artistic. She proved herself a valuable aid to him in his new novel; and he would ask himself in bewilderment, if this woman, with her intellectual grasp, her apt discernment could be the same as she, whom, perhaps

but the night before, he had seen uncontrolled in the web of an hysterical outbreak? It was as if two souls held possession at will of the tenement of her body. And it was glimpses of the higher one that encouraged him, and kept him faithful to his task.

One day, six months perhaps after their arrival in New York, she said to him: "I must have something to do; some duty, some work, else I shall go mad." He welcomed the sign as a healthy one. "I have been thinking I could make a good actress," she went on. "Let me go to one of the schools, and see what they can make of me."

The idea, which she advanced was unutterably distasteful to him.

He negatived it at once, and positively. He had a masterful way with him, when disapproving, which always irritated her, and had the effect of making her more tenacious of her own ideas.

"And why not?" she demanded imperiously.

"Because I do not like the idea. It would not do at all!" he replied. What, expose this woman, with her uncertain moods, her powers of fascination to the dangers of the stage! He would not hear of it. She cajoled, teased, irritated and angered him—giving him no rest—defying his authority, taunting him with the fact that he had no *right* to control her actions or deny her desires, until, finally, she gained her end.

For three years, this strange woman flung herself heart and soul into her dramatic studies, finding a vent for the emotional passions of her

nature. At the expiration of that period she graduated from the leading school of dramatic art in New York, with a reputation of great artistic promise, and eager to try her talents on the professional stage. But now Boisey absolutely and uncompromisingly refused his consent to a public appearance. During those three years of keen study their lives had passed more peaceably; but at the present time, thwarted in her desire, the old storms of hysterical violence burst forth once more. A hundred times he cursed his weakness in having yielded in the first place to her wishes. But it had apparently worked so well. The intellectual study, the fascination of it, had given a healthier tone to her mind. Ultimately, however, vanity reasserted itself, and thwarted, posed as a martyr. She wanted to make her own living! That was the theme she harped on. Bitter words, violent scenes became of daily occurrence, and still Boisey would not yield. If he could only trust her, what a relief it would be to send her forth to win her spurs in this chosen field.

Four years had now elapsed since they left England; and what change could he record, what reward for those four years of patience, loyalty, forbearance? No sustained effort of higher, nobler purpose; only the same spasmodic trials, the same mercurial temperament, baffling, irritating, fascinating. What had he accomplished? Simply kept the devil at bay. For that much at least he could be thankful. Two novels and one new play, in collaboration with Gibbon, had been his offering

in those four years—all well received. But the two books were distinguished by a brilliant cynicism, sparkling yet acid, never before noticed in his work; condemned by some critics, praised by others, not detracting, however, from the sale of the works.

It was now October, in the fourth year of his exile. Dorothy, since the opening of the theatrical season in September, in her endeavors to gain his consent to her professional début, had wearied him almost beyond endurance. He was exhausted, and conscious of a great hunger for England, for home. Correspondence seemed a poor makeshift for familiar intercourse. He longed for his old haunts—old friends; and, when on this fair October morning, he perceived amongst his mail a letter from Gibbon, homesickness, such as he had never before experienced, seized him. Opening it, he saw that it contained another letter, addressed to him in the care of Gibbon.

Then he remembered. Before leaving London, he had had an interview with Dorothy's first landlady, aunt of her legal husband.

He had found Dorothy's story confirmed; and the landlady had been outspoken in the denunciation of her nephew's rascality; and had expressed a good deal of pity, and some real sympathy, for Dorothy. Boisey had left with her Gibbon's address, with instructions to communicate through him, should anything new develop in regard to her nephew. And now, at the expiration of four years there had come a sign.

Derwent, however, was hardly prepared for the contents of the letter, which ran:

“DEAR SIR:

“I have to inform you, that my nephew died three days ago—died, as he lived—disgracefully; his death the result of a drunken brawl. I inclose a copy of the certificate of his death, properly attested; also a newspaper cutting. Dorothy is now free, and I hope it will be a warning to her to act more wisely in future.”

Boisey's first impulse was to rush at once with the news to Dorothy. He rose quickly from the table, went up to his room, with only the one thought in his mind—her freedom.

Suddenly the question flashed over him, what would it mean? Then a sense of bewilderment seized him. He passed his hand over his forehead. Thoughts were struggling together, and refused to arrange themselves in order. How would it affect him? What would she do now? Would things continue in their present fashion?

Then all at once he knew. No more question: no more doubt. He put on his light overcoat and hat, and went straight to her.

Giving the letter into her hand, he spoke at once, gravely, directly.

“Dorothy, the man who had a legal claim upon you; because of whom, we are here—as we are—is dead. I have come to tell you, and to ask you to marry me at once.”

Dorothy looked at him for a moment without speaking, her face going from white to red; and from red to white.

"Is it true?" she asked, at length huskily.

"It is true," and answering, he unfolded the letter and paper, and made her read.

Then she looked at him, joy and reproach struggling in her face: "I am free! and yet you would bind me again!"

"I would have you save your good name," he replied quietly.

She turned away from him, and looked out of the window, but he could see her hands working nervously.

"It is the only course," he added, still in the same repressed tone.

"I do not feel so sure of that!" she said, without turning towards him. She did not see the look of hopeless weariness, which aged his face, and which did not pass without an effort.

"What other is there?" He waited patiently for the answer, which was slow in coming; then, when she turned at last, and looked at him, he caught his breath hard, and the next moment he had gripped her fiercely by the wrist; his voice was rough and uneven, as he compelled her gaze.

"There is no other way. Do you think I can't read the devil in your heart? But I say, this way you shall go, and no other. Do you think that I am going to stand by and see you throw away these past four years as of no account; though God knows, sometimes I feel that is what they are!

But you know me well enough to realize that if I begin a thing, I will see it through. And that is what I mean to do by you."

She shrugged her shoulders, and her eyes dropped sulkily: "If I am never to have my own way!"

"When shall it be, Dorothy? to-morrow?" He spoke more gently.

"As well get it over!" she replied ungraciously; then, suddenly she remembered that a letter was due from Fairfax. She could not be married on the day she received that.

"No, not to-morrow! To-morrow week. Yes, I promise you, Derwent. To-morrow week. That will be a Friday"—she gave a little shudder. "The superstition of its ill-luck only matches the rest! To-morrow week, then; one should pay some respect to the dead, I suppose."

He could not hide the disgust he felt at her flippancy. She saw it, and her expression changed.

"Derwent, you make a mistake in doing this for me. Why do you love me so much?"

He could not answer at once. Fortunately for him, she seemed to expect no reply. She liked to think he was her slave; but she hated tangible proof of it. She had no conception that it was a high-strung sense of duty and responsibility, in which love had long ceased to play a part, that made him wish to bind her to him.

All he said, as he left her, was: "To-morrow week, you will be my wife. I have your word?"

"I give you my word," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

OUTSIDE, he realized what the interview had cost him. The future looked very dreary. He turned into Fifth Avenue, with the intention of walking up to the park; he felt the need of air; he was oppressed beyond words. He had only gone a block, when he saw two figures approaching from the opposite direction, which looked strangely familiar; the one a stout, dignified matron, the other a slender figure in slight mourning.

Then his face flushed with pleasure, for they had stopped before him, in smiling recognition.

"Mr. Boisey!" both exclaimed.

"Mrs. Baldwin! Lady Carstairs! This is a pleasure!"

As those two calm, gracious English faces smiled upon him, his mental atmosphere seemed cleared from some horrible miasma.

"Come and lunch with us!" said Mrs. Baldwin. "We are at the Waldorf."

"Yes, do!" echoed Violet Carstairs. "We had hoped to run across you. Indeed we had tried to find you out, but strangely failed." There was an unconscious question in her eyes. Boisey sighed. It was not strange to him! No one knew much of Derwent Boisey in New York.

"And Mrs. Boisey," Violet was saying, "is she well? I hope we shall see her." They entered the hotel, as she spoke, and Boisey was saved an

answer. The two hours he spent with mother and daughter were the happiest he had known in four years.

Mrs. Baldwin, during a short interval when Violet was not present, gave him the details of Sir Geoffrey's death.

"Of course you had heard of their marriage!" she began. "It occurred a few months after you left England. Poor fellow! His death was so shockingly sudden! They had only been married a year, and they were devoted to each other. Violet always was more or less nervous about hunting, and the hounds never met that she did not feel worried; but she was too unselfish, too wise ever to ask him to give it up, for he was passionately devoted to it. It all happened in a moment, as those things do. How, one never knows! One remembers only the stiff fence, not quite cleared; horse and man down—Ah!" she sighed heavily. She had loved Violet's husband. "They had brought him home. His spine was broken! And the baby, that had been looked forward to with such joy, was born dead. Life is very sad for some of us, Mr. Boisey! It nearly overwhelmed my child: but, thank God! not quite. She is one of the sweetest, noblest souls; never thinking of herself; always trying to relieve some other woman's pain. It is the women who appeal to her so much: every one loves her."

That life tragedy of hers, so quietly told, stirred Boisey greatly. He had an intense sympathy with all phases of life.

"And Lillian?" he asked.

"Lillian is very comfortably married. Her husband is very rich, and she is absolutely content."

A neat little epitome of Lillian Baldwin's life history, thought Boisey.

When the widowed Lady Carstairs re-entered the room, he watched her with increased interest. There remained with him always, after that day, the feeling that she was the most womanly woman he had ever met. In that impression, he knew he was paying her his soul's highest tribute.

As he was parting from them, she again referred to Dorothy.

"You will bring Mrs. Boisey to see us? Or shall we call upon her first?"

Boisey did not know what to answer. A strange longing seized him to tell Mrs. Baldwin the truth, but he forced it down. They must never know; and in a week, she would in very truth be his wife.

"You are very kind," he said; "Mrs. Boisey will I am sure, be pleased to meet you again. I will bring her with me some day."

He committed himself to the lie, but it cost him a pang, as he met Violet's clear eyes. He felt that nothing but truth should face them.

"Why not to-morrow?" she was saying. "Come and lunch with us, both of you!"

"Not to-morrow, I thank you. But, shall we say this day week? the day before you sail? You go on the *Lucania*, you say."

How hard it was! When he himself would gladly have gone that day and every day. The astonish-

ment on both their faces almost made him smile, in spite of his pain.

"This day week? Surely you are jesting! We will take no excuse! If not to-morrow—then the day after."

So he was forced to leave it.

He went on to the park, after he had left them. He sat there till late in the evening; then he went back to his room, and shut himself up. He could not see Dorothy that night. Never had he realized to the full before what he had given up—not only in the past, but for the future. What a life lay before him! He had to be alone to fight out his misery. Though never once, to his credit be it said, did he waver from his intention of making the woman who had ruined his life, his wife. He would force her to it, that next day if he could. He felt it would choke him to lie to Violet again, though that lie was necessary for another woman's honor. It had hurt him more than anything he remembered in his life before.

Next day, if human will could prevail, Dorothy should in truth be Dorothy Boisey.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE is Mrs. Boisey? Not going to disappoint us surely?" Mrs. Baldwin permitted a well-bred air of surprise tinged with displeasure to accompany her question, of which Boisey was not so conscious, however, as of the quiet, questioning gaze of Lady Carstairs. To her, indeed, it was as if she looked upon a strange face. Never had she seen it wear such a hard, stern expression.

"Mrs. Baldwin," he said, and his voice matched his face: "I must be frank with you, and throw myself upon your mercy. You will remember, perhaps, that Mrs. Boisey was always possessed of an erratic temperament. It leads the possessor sometimes into mistakes. Mrs. Boisey bids me say, that she regrets she does not feel well enough to accept your kind invitation for to-day. May I be permitted to hope that for old acquaintance's sake, I may accept it, though alone?"

He was horribly conscious of the false position he was in, through his failure to influence Dorothy to his will; horribly conscious of the insult of her apparent refusal to meet the Baldwins. In sooth she had been anxious to go, but only on one condition would he agree—that of their immediate marriage. But she had obstinately refused to do other than fulfil her word, to marry him on the day she had agreed. A stormy and most unpleasant interview had been the result.

“Mr. Boisey, we shall always be happy to see you!” Human nature could hardly be expected not to resent such a slight, neither could Boisey fail to hear the accent on the word *you*. He bowed silently. For a few moments a slight constraint was visible, but Violet, the instant she detected it, set herself to remove it, and so grateful was her womanly tact, the soft, sweet tone of her voice, to Boisey, that the jarred nerves insensibly yielded, and before an hour had passed the hardness had left his face, died out of his voice; and he felt conscious that the best in him was responding to her.

She had a woman’s intuition that he was not happy, that some sorrow was weighing on him; and with her ready sympathy for all hurt, which was always at service for those in need of it—man, woman, child, or dumb animal—she longed to soothe him.

She saw herself how her efforts were repaid, and when, at last, he reluctantly rose to leave, she said:

“You must come again. Don’t forget that we are old friends, and that it may be some time before we meet again, unless you return to England?” A slight pause, a suggested question. He made no reply; so she continued: “Mother and I have quite a passion for old friendships—we like to think we are not forgotten. We have less than a week remaining, before we sail for England. If you have no objection, I propose, that as you have lunched to-day with us on my mother’s invitation, you dine with us to-morrow evening—on mine!”

Lady Carstairs was a little startled at the sudden glorification of his face. It was but a momentary revelation, quickly controlled, and it was not seen by Mrs. Baldwin.

The latter, however, after the novelist's departure, took her daughter somewhat to task.

"Do you think, Violet, it was quite—er—wise of you to ask him again, after his wife's refusal to come with him?"

"Mother," answered Lady Carstairs gently, "you remember what an irresponsible creature Dorothy Boisey was! I did not really expect her to-day. Do not let her refusal influence us against our old friend. Remember we can not judge her as one would an ordinary woman. What would have been a decided insult coming from another, was in her, perhaps, merely a whim. Mr. Boisey is, I am certain, unhappy. How can he be otherwise, exiled as he is! We do not know the reason, but we can surmise it must have been a very strong one, to lead him to give up his friends, his country, and bury himself here. For he is buried. We know that. He has no acquaintances. *He* is not known—only his work. You know that publisher, to whom we went for information, did not even know that he lived in New York. Therefore, if we can lighten his burden a little, by letting him see that his old friends do not forget him, it may help him. It is worth while trying at any rate—don't you think?"

Mrs. Baldwin kissed her. "So like you, Violet, dear, always trying to help some one. Perhaps

you are right. Sometimes you make me feel that I must be a very worldly, evil-minded old woman, for I have doubts, and you never have any."

CHAPTER XXIV

OF course he dined with them. He never dreamt of refusing Violet's invitation. That Sunday evening passed like a dream to him. He found himself recalling these three meetings, like a schoolboy. He felt they were truly his Red Letter days. He had seen her on Thursday, again Saturday, and on this Sunday evening. And he was to see her to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, if so he chose, until she sailed away. He never stopped to analyze; never tried to understand the meaning of the song his heart was singing; he only was conscious of a wonderful calm on the stormy waters of his life. He knew it was temporary, but he blessed it. It never occurred to him, that it was a curious fact that Dorothy did not question him, that she accepted his constant absence as a matter of course. When he saw her she did not allude to their coming marriage, did not mention the Baldwins. And he for the first time was too absorbed to notice her attitude. He awoke with a shock. The week had run on to Thursday. Mother and daughter had dined with him that evening, at Sherry's; he had strolled back with them to their hotel, and on their invita-

tion had entered with them. How restful it was sitting quietly listening to Violet's low voice, watching her expressive face. How reposeful she was; a gentlewoman truly! He was silent. Usually a ready talker, to-night words would not come. Intuitively Violet felt that this man was burdened with some sorrow. She had all a woman's longing to help him, to lighten his load, but she had a dread of being intrusive.

He looked up suddenly, roused from his reverie, by the consciousness that his silence had been shared for some moments by her; that Mrs. Baldwin had left the room. They were alone.

"You are tired, are you not?" she said gently. "Do you never long for England again? I should think it would refresh you to visit your own country, renew your acquaintance with old friends!"

For one moment he looked at her without speaking. But that look revealed to her a depth of suffering she had not thought of.

"Long to return?" he said. "Aye, as a thirsting man longs for water. I can not speak of it. But you are the first to guess it. I have kept silence well."

Her face grew very sad, very tender, as she listened. Unwittingly, she felt, she had bared a wound.

"Forgive me!" she said, "if I have hurt you. Indeed I never intended that. I have suffered so much myself. My mother has told you—that it makes me long to let others know how I sympathize with sorrow."

"Dear lady, I know. I realize too what a lesson you teach me—that suffering nobly borne is a crown. Believe me your sympathy is very precious to me. I too have known sorrow—but I can not speak of it."

She put out her hand. He took it, bent over it, till his lips touched it, as he might a queen's.

He was glad that she had spoken; glad that she had divined that he too had suffered. It seemed like a seal upon the honor of his silence.

When next he spoke, it was in his usual manner. He referred to their departure: "This meeting with you and your mother, the privilege you have granted to me of intimate friendship, has been an oasis to me. It shall strengthen me on my journey of life—I shall have something to remember: something to be grateful for."

"So little!" murmured Violet.

"More than you can think for!" he answered quietly—Mrs. Baldwin returned at that moment, and he prepared to leave.

"We shall see you to-morrow!" she said.

To-morrow! Violet saw the uncontrollable start, and as she looked, she noticed how his face all at once grew gray and old.

"To-morrow!" he repeated the word mechanically: "No, I think not. No, dear friends, I will bid you good-bye and God speed to-night. To-morrow it will be impossible for me to come—and you will forgive me, will you not, when I tell you I could not bear to see you start. It has been a

peculiarity of mine, that. I have always refused to see my friends off."

Both Mrs. Baldwin and Violet showed that they felt hurt. Boisey saw it; but what could he say? To-morrow was to be his wedding-day, a fact he had just remembered with a shock. He could not tell them he was to wed the next day the woman they had believed his wife for years. And now since that quiet half hour just passed, he realized that he could not trust himself to see too much of Violet Carstairs. He heard her speaking, as in a dream.

"Then we can only hope to see you soon in England, Mr. Boisey. Try and persuade Mrs. Boisey that it would not only be a pleasure to your old friends to welcome you home, but a benefit to both of you to take the trip."

"You are too good!" he murmured. He knew that his leave taking was wretchedly bald and unsatisfactory; knew that it caused him one of the severest pangs he had known, but duty meant silence, and silent he must be.

Go back to England! The thought haunted him on his way to his rooms; haunted him till the longing was well-nigh insupportable. And yet he knew that it was the last thing he must hope for, as long as Rodney Fairfax was there. This then was to be his lot: to be the guardian of a woman who did not love him; whom he no longer loved; to be exiled for her sake; subject to her varying moods; to be more often reviled than thanked. He must shut the gates upon the glimpse of Paradise

he had enjoyed that week. For in the silent hours before sleep visited him, he realized what life might have meant for him, had it been crowned with the love of such a woman as Violet Carstairs. He could have worshipped her: what a power was hers of calling out all that was best in others! God bless her! She should do that for him. What talent was his, he would consecrate to her. Henceforth he would write for her. It should be his secret. She would never know it. It should be his tribute to her. For her he would try to keep alive high ideals, lofty aspiration, purity of thought. He would keep his manhood. That other woman should not drag him down. He must be constant in his effort to lift her up. That was what Violet Carstairs would try and do. The thought that she would approve comforted him, and he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Boisey called for Dorothy the next morning, he was composed, strong as one who had fought for, and gained, self-mastery. She, on the other hand, was agitated; her eyes had a seeking, restless expression, which he noticed at once.

"What is troubling you?" he spoke quite gently, as one might to a child.

"I am full of nervous dread. I wish this had

not to be, Derwent. Something seems holding me back, some presentiment! Oh, you think me foolish, I know, but Derwent, I beg of you, let us postpone this for a week, a day, yes, even twenty-four hours."

The hard stern look she hated, was on his face: all the gentleness had died out of his voice, as he answered: "Not an hour, Dorothy; you are trifling with yourself and with me. Will you never realize the seriousness of the situation? It is no time for words. Come!" He took her hand and led her to the door.

She went as a victim. She could not tell him that she was consumed with anxiety because no letter had arrived from Fairfax, for he did not know of their correspondence. She had expected one by the mid-week mail. He never failed her. Regularly once in each month on a certain date, she heard from him.

She was the more anxious now, because the last communication had been but a few hurried lines, written apparently under some mental stress. As she said to Boisey some presentiment held her, though she could not tell him of what.

An hour later they returned. She bore now, legally, the title which had been hers before. She was Derwent Boisey's wife. It was a strange wedding: no greetings; no lover-like endearments. Husband and wife entered the room silently. Dorothy gave a hasty glance round. No letter! Then she flung herself wearily into a chair.

Boisey came over to the window by which she was seated, and looked at her gravely.

"A new beginning, Dorothy," he said at last: "Shall we try and make it a good one?"

To his surprise, she burst into tears.

"Derwent, you are too good to me! too good!" she sobbed. She rose from her chair, and stood facing him, and the tears fell fast over her cheeks. She laid one hand almost timidly on his arm: "Too good!" she repeated. "Do you think that with all my folly, all my wickedness, that I am blind to your goodness, your patience? Oh, there are times, when I could worship that goodness of yours, as there are other times, and many more, alas, of them, when I hate it! This past week, when I have seen so little of you, I have been trying to persuade myself to make an effort to be more worthy of you; trying to nerve myself to make a great sacrifice for you!" She paused, and another sob shook her.

Boisey was touched. He put his hand on hers. It shocked him to feel her instinctive withdrawal of hers! It was only a spasmodic action. She left it in his, after that first movement.

"Ah, Dorothy," he said sadly, "if I could only believe you—only trust you!"

"Oh, but you must. Indeed I have thought of this very seriously, Derwent. I said to myself, if I do this, I shall not be quite so unworthy of him. I shall be moving upwards a little nearer to his plane." She paused, somewhat carried away by her own enthusiasm. Her imagination was so act-

ive that a passing thought, spoken of, became almost an established fact with her. And it had in truth, passed through her mind, that it would be her duty, as Boisey's wife, to give up this correspondence with Fairfax.

"Well," said Boisey, smiling in spite of himself, "I have yet to learn what this wonderful renunciation is! I can guess though!"

"You can?" She looked up at him with startled eyes.

"Yes!" He smiled confidently at her.

"How did you guess?" A sudden and most evil look of suspicion flashed in her eyes, as she drew herself away from him: "Have you played the spy on me! have you dared——"

"Stop, Dorothy!" he commanded. "It seems this is something serious. I had only thought of your desire to join the dramatic profession. I thought you meant to give up the idea of becoming a professional actress." He laid a slight stress on the adjective. "It seems that was not what you had in your mind. What did you mean by your suggested accusation? You have enjoyed absolute freedom. Explain, if you please, what you mean by the terms you used?"

She laughed hysterically: "It was nothing! I meant nothing!" The impulse to confess, to do the right, was gone.

How had she ever been so foolish? But he faced her sternly: "I have a right to your answer. And I demand the truth, Dorothy!"

Even while he waited, a knock came at the door.

It was opened, and a letter handed in. Dorothy seized it, tore open the envelope, and began reading it.

She had forgotten Derwent's presence, his very existence. The strange ecstasy that always filled her at the sight of Fairfax's writing, the touch of the paper that had been in his hands, held her.

Derwent watched her curiously. All at once he saw her face whiten, flush, then whiten again, as she caught her breath. What happened after, he could hardly recall distinctly.

He was conscious of a woman facing him, with eyes blazing with madness, conscious of a high shrill voice, entirely unlike Dorothy's cultivated tones conscious of hideous words, violent gestures. Good God! What had happened!

"Curse you!" a woman's voice was crying: "Curse you! Curse your goodness! See what you have done! He is free! free! And you have bound me! You! Why did it not come yesterday? Oh, God! Why did you take away to-day from me?" Her voice died away in a shrieking sob, and she flung herself down on the floor, clutching her letter with one hand, tearing her gown, her hair, the rug, anything within reach, with the other.

Derwent Boisey sickened, as he looked at her. This was his wife! For a moment he could not speak. When he did, he did not recognize his own voice.

"Get up! Do not shame your womanhood

more!" He tried to raise her, but she fought him like a mad thing.

"Don't touch me!" she shrieked. "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!" The phrase died away in a moan.

"Let me see that letter!"

"No, you shall not touch it! It is mine!"

"I will see it! Give it me. Don't force me to take it!"

"You shall not pollute it with your touch!"

She was on her feet, facing him, defying him. She was like some wild animal at bay, clutching the letter against her breast. She was full of a weird, baneful beauty.

"Then read it to me yourself! It is, I presume, from Fairfax?"

"Yes!"

"Have you corresponded with him, all these years?"

"Yes!"

"In spite of your promise to me?"

"Yes!"

A groan forced itself from him. He had not fathomed depths so low. To this he was bound!

"What is in that letter? Do you force me to see for myself?" He took a step towards her. She drew back.

"Don't come nearer. Don't dare to touch me. I will tell you. His wife is dead. And I am bound!"

Boisey recoiled. Heavens! Could she not see the depths of her own infamy?

"Dead? When?"

"Two months ago!"

"Two months ago! Only that! And you can think of filling her place. Are you a woman?"

She turned her eyes on him full of reproach: "Not now—but later. Think of it! I might have been his wife! His wife!" Her eyes were suddenly suffused with a radiant tenderness such as Boisey had never seen, and which, all at once, softened him somewhat. How could one judge this woman, who was without apparently any moral sense, but, who loved, absolutely blind to every existing responsibility; blind to everything but her own great and most constant passion?

He felt baffled, hopeless. He turned away. What could he say? All these years of struggle were fruitless.

When next he looked at her, she was seated at the table, her arms flung outward on it, her head buried in them, tearless sobs rending her.

He walked away from her over to the window. He looked out, seeing nothing. What could he do? And merciful Heaven! How was he to bear it? If life had been hideous these past four years, it bid fair to be a veritable hell now! He was sick at heart. He turned again, and looked at her. She had raised her head, the sobs were stilled. She was looking at him, with a look he never forgot, so full it was of concentrated fury and baffled desire.

Slowly she spoke: "I will never live with you. If I did, I should kill you in your sleep."

"What do you propose to do?"

She looked at him defiantly: "I propose to return to England."

"With me?"

She looked at him with a shudder of horror.

"No! No!"

"And I?" With difficulty he controlled himself.

"You have your work. You do it as well here, it seems to me."

Human nature could stand no more. His anger, let loose, came like a torrent. "What devil has possession of you? Can you stand there, face to face with me, and utter such falsehoods? No! the you, the real you, can not dare! Do you pretend to ignore the years of sacrifice I have made for you. God in Heaven! I have immolated the best of me, in the hope of your salvation. I have given up my country, my friends, almost my reputation, my honor, for you. You know that my work has suffered, and I say that I will have some return. You are my wife. And you return to England with me. My exile has lasted long enough. And you will write, now, at my dictation, your last letter to Mr. Rodney Fairfax. No words! No hysterics! Do you hear me? I will have no scene. Sit here." He took her by the shoulders, but she struggled like an angry child, tearing at him with her hands, giving vent to horrid little screams.

He never faltered. He knew that if he did not conquer now, he would have no further influence;

and though it sickened him to pit his masculine strength against this apparently fragile woman, he knew the necessity.

"Sit down!" he repeated; he deepened his pressure on her arms, and she was compelled to obey. "Now, take this pen. Here is paper. Here is ink. Write—Mr. Rodney Fairfax, my husband, Derwent Boisey——"

"I will not! I will not!" she screamed, flinging the pen across the room.

"Very well," he said quietly. "*Then I will.*" She looked at him in dumb mutiny; watched him, while he quietly picked up the pen, seated himself, drew the paper towards him, and, after a moment's thought, began to write; when he had finished, he blotted off the note, and read it to her:

"Mr. Derwent Boisey requests that Mr. Rodney Fairfax will henceforth cease his correspondence with the lady who to-day has become legally entitled—'Mrs. Derwent Boisey.'"

"The address?" he asked.

She did not answer immediately. He waited patiently, pen poised in hand. Slowly, as if dragged from her, came the street and number of his house in London.

Boisey, still with that air of enforced calm, directed the envelope, sealed and stamped it.

Then followed a scene he never cared to recall—a scene, which left them both exhausted, white to the lips—a scene which, though it left him master in the end, left him also a legacy of mental and

physical depression almost too heavy for endurance.

When he had left her, and gone back to his own room that night, and sat, smoking, trying to calm himself, the contrast between this day—his marriage day—and those he had spent in the past week, came home to him, sharply, painfully.

Yesterday and To-day! The gulf which divided them was immeasurable, impassable.

CHAPTER XXVI

“**L**ISTEN to this, mother!” said Violet Carstairs, one morning at breakfast, about a month after their return to England.

“‘Mr. Derwent Boisey, the well-known author, has returned to London. It will be remembered that the play, ‘A Matter of Temperament,’ the last joint production of Messrs Boisey and Gibbon, is now entering on the tenth month of its highly successful run. It is rumored that a new production may be looked for early in the coming year. Mr. Boisey has been gathering plenty of material, during his long sojourn in America, the result of which will be welcomed by his many friends in England.’”

“Well, my dear?” remarked Mrs. Baldwin dryly.

Violet looked at her reproachfully. “It is well that they have returned. I am glad of it. A

man has responsibilities towards his talents. Mr. Boisey's place is here, with his work."

"Ah, well! I always felt there was some mystery at the bottom of his running away! I felt more certain of it than ever, when Mrs. Boisey failed to materialize in New York. I wonder what he has done with her. Perhaps she is dead, and he didn't like to say so. She was just the sort of woman to drive a man to murder!"

"But not such a man as Derwent Boisey!" disclaimed Violet warmly. "We shall probably hear of them soon. He is quite a celebrity here, you must remember! Let us go and see 'A Matter of Temperament' to-night, shall we? You enjoyed it, when we first saw it, before we went away. Let us go, mother!"

"Very well, my dear. We can drive round that way, and get seats!"

When they got to the box-office they found every seat taken. One box alone was left, and that they secured. Violet realized with some surprise that she would have been keenly disappointed could they not have gone that evening, though she could give herself no reason.

They were rather late in arriving; the overture was nearly over. When they were seated, they looked leisurely round the house; then, as Violet's eyes rested on the box opposite, they met those of Derwent Boisey. Violet gently touched her mother, and both ladies bowed and smiled in pleased recognition.

"Mrs. Boisey too, mother!" and again they bowed.

"What a pretty woman she is!" Violet spoke with generous admiration.

"I suppose Violet Baldwin—I beg her pardon, Lady Carstairs—is the sort of woman you admire, Derwent! Such a *safe* woman to marry! I remember recommending her to poor Geoffrey Carstairs, when he insisted that he preferred to marry me!" Mrs. Boisey laughed, a little unpleasantly, and watched her husband keenly.

He did not answer her, only his lips tightened together. He looked worn and tired. Each day that had followed that terrible one of their marriage had been a struggle; and he showed its effects. To-night she looked radiantly attractive. Her vanity was soothed. She knew people were looking at Derwent Boisey's wife. They could not fail to admire; perhaps some whisper of that admiration might reach Fairfax. She was at last in the same atmosphere with him. She might see him at any moment. Her eyes eagerly scanned the house. At the same time it annoyed her that Boisey should admire Violet Carstairs. For she believed that he was still madly infatuated with herself, and that she could do what she liked with him, if it should suit her to excite his passion.

Her excitement did not last, however. She did not think it necessary to pretend to be interested in the play. Did she not know every line of it by heart? Besides the leading woman annoyed her. "It is a pity you don't let me play that part, Der-

went. People would see then what you meant it to be!" She leant towards him: "Let me!" She flashed one of her old, alluring glances at him.

"No!" he said, quite unmoved. "I am content. The way it is played suits me. And, Dorothy, that subject is dropped, you understand!"

She leant back in her chair, sullen, bored. It had tickled her vanity, for the moment, to picture herself there, before that brilliant audience, playing the part as she knew she could, dressed as she would dress it; and perhaps Fairfax would see her; see the admiration of the people; would adore her!

At the end of the first act, she was bored to death. Two or three men, old friends of Boisey's, dropped in; that roused her somewhat, but when the second act began, she leant back in the same listless attitude. When the curtain dropped on that she yawned, though the house was ringing with applause. One of Boisey's friends returned. Boisey rose: "You will stay with Mrs. Boisey till I come back? Excuse me for a few moments."

"Welcome home." As Boisey held Violet Carstairs' hand, listened to the gracious words of greeting, that same sense of physical and spiritual rest that he had experienced in her presence in New York, fell on him. His face softened, and when Mrs. Baldwin said: "You must be pleased with the way your play is rendered, such really clever acting!" he smiled without effort.

"Indeed, yes! Were you surprised to hear of my return?" He was speaking to Mrs. Baldwin,

but he was looking at Lady Carstairs. Then he saw her eyes dilate, saw an expression of startled perplexity shadow them. Then he became aware that she was looking not at him, but across to the box where his wife was. He instinctively followed her gaze. He saw Dorothy standing, her back to them, saw that she was leaning with both hands heavily clasped on the back of her chair, speaking evidently to some one at the entrance to the box, whom he could not see; saw the man, whom he had left with her, come eagerly to her assistance, as she turned, swaying slightly. Then she sank into her chair. The person with whom she had spoken had left her. But her face! What a transformation! It was white as death, but bathed in a strange, terrible radiance, which Boisey recognized but too well. His heart sank.

"You will excuse me? I fear Mrs. Boisey is not well. She is not very strong. I shall look forward to the pleasure of seeing you again."

He was gone. Mrs. Baldwin smiled.

"I am afraid he does not find Mrs. Boisey any more easy to manage than he did Dorothy Deming!"

Violet sighed to herself.

When Boisey re-entered the box, Dorothy turned a smiling face to him, to which the color had come back.

"We have just been saying how proud you must feel, Derwent: how glad to have returned to London. Mr. Blank agrees with me that I have

been horribly selfish in keeping you away so long—for, of course, I told him it was all my fault. Do you know I can hardly realize how we stood it so long. I hate New York, don't you, Derwent? I never want to leave London again. It is all charming! charming!"

She smiled on both men with childlike audacity, but from one she met no response. Derwent looked her straight in the face, and she knew that he understood. With a note of excitement in her voice, she said:

"Mr. Blank, won't you share our box now until the end of the performance? It is so pleasant to me to welcome Mr. Boisey's old friends!"

Mr. Blank smiled a flattered assent, but Boisey knew it was because she did not wish to be alone with him.

"You were speaking to some one! Who was your visitor?" he asked quietly aside of his wife.

She looked at him with wide open, too innocent eyes.

"One of the attendants, he brought me a glass of water!"

"Ah! something had occurred to distress you? Lady Carstairs was the first to notice it. It was that which brought me back in such haste. I feared you were agitated, ill." There was no lover-like anxiety in his tone to match the apparent care of his words, and his mouth was set in a hard, uncompromising line.

"What nonsense, Derwent! I am flattered that

even when talking to Lady Carstairs, you could think of me!"

She smiled at him in her fascinating way; then turned to Blank: "Did you ever meet with a husband before in your existence, Mr. Blank, who after—let me see—nearly five years, would leave the society of old friends—charming people! you remember, Derwent?—friends from whom he had been separated so long, as Mr. Boisey did just now, simply because he fancied I was not well?"

"I can quite realize his devotion!" asserted Blank, looking boldly into her eyes. "Mrs. Boisey could not fail to command it."

Derwent heard the words; saw the look which accompanied them; saw that his wife's abnormal vanity was gratified by what a woman of finer sensibility would have resented. Yet he knew that there was no more danger in her vanity than in a child's except where one man was concerned. But all the same it hurt him. Every now and then he saw her hand go up to her bosom. She was apparently toying with the flowers and lace on her corsage: in reality she was caressing a note concealed there—only a line on a visiting card, which had been handed her by one of the attendants when Boisey had gone to the opposite box.

"I must see you. Write." That was all. But the knowledge that for the first time in their acquaintance Fairfax sought her, intoxicated her. She had had just one glimpse of him, before

Boisey had returned. One brief, absorbing look, then she saw him leave the theater.

She remained gay, cheerful until the close of the performance, and as nothing further occurred to excite his suspicions, Boisey concluded that they had been too easily aroused. Seeing how excitement agreed with her, he determined, much as he disliked society himself, to throw himself into it for her sake; to keep her moving; to allow her small time to think.

Mr. and Mrs. Boisey were very much in evidence in the ensuing weeks, and the latter found it very difficult to communicate with, or see Fairfax, for the devotion of the playwright to his fascinating wife became a byword. So unostentatious, yet so constant—he was her shadow. The Christmas holidays they spent at a great house party, entertained by one of the social leaders of the year. Mrs. Boisey's brilliancy and charm added to her popularity. Only twice had she been able to compass actual meeting with Fairfax, and then it had been each time at a crowded reception, with her husband by her side. It had been simply a look, a few words of greeting, but she had lived upon those, and upon the letters which she was occasionally able to exchange with him. It seemed that although her freedom was outwardly absolute, she was in truth a prisoner: all her movements arranged beforehand, duly chronicled in the society papers. At first the novelty of being a personage, or rather the wife of a personage, kept her in good humor, and

Boisey flattered himself on the success of his scheme. She was clever enough to see through his plan; clever enough to lend herself to it; and at times she was moved to a deep sense of gratitude, and was ashamed of her own unworthiness. Beyond that, she could not rise.

As the weeks rolled by, and the first warm, spring-like days of April came, a passionate rebellion seized her—a passionate longing for freedom, for sunshine, for flowers, for love. It grew upon her day by day, fed by her own concentrated thought, till desire became famine. She had been so ready to go anywhere with Boisey; had shown herself so willing to receive his friends, whenever he willed; had been so amiable, so apparently content, that he had almost allowed his suspicions to slumber. For he knew that she did not meet Fairfax. At last he began to feel that he dared devote himself absolutely to finishing the new play, which was scheduled for production the middle of May. He wanted to shut himself up with Gibbon for a couple of weeks, from early morning till evening, and now he dared arrange this, he told himself, with a sigh of relief. Gibbon was the only man who surmised anything of his difficulties. He had urged upon Boisey what the latter himself knew only too well—the imperative necessity of this two weeks' seclusion, and absolute devotion to finishing detail. He had been very patient with Boisey, because of the knowledge which had come to him, bit by bit—disjointed, impersonal droppings, as it were, which

had fitted together, and made a tolerably consecutive, explicable whole in his mind. The two men never spoke of the subject, but in some way Boisey knew that Gibbon understood, and in a fashion it comforted him. April had run four days, when he told Dorothy of the arrangement he had made with Gibbon. "Don't accept any new invitations for me, and make what excuses you can, for those in hand. Go everywhere yourself. Enjoy your holiday." He paused, and looked at her wistfully, but she made no sign; so he continued more heavily: "You see how I trust you now. Mrs. Boisey has borne her part so bravely in the social swim that I believe she will keep on the top of the wave to the end. Do you think I don't know what an effort it has been? I admire you for it. I always knew you had courage. Keep tight hold of it; it will not fail you!" Dorothy smiled. At last she had won his confidence!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE next morning Boisey left her soon after nine o'clock.

"You will hardly be dull!" he said: "You lunch, you tell me, at Lady Port-Allen's, dine at Mrs. Lacy's, and go on to the Duchess' reception."

"Don't think of me," she answered, with a pretty seriousness. "Give all your thought to

your work." She was always deeply interested in his work, whatever her feelings towards him. It was a kind of intellectual dissipation, which she allowed herself. She was one of the most appreciative, yet most unsparing of his critics.

That night, at the Duchess' reception, she encountered Fairfax. The crush was tremendous. After a while, it was the easiest thing in the world to be lost in it oneself, but to find some one else. It was the first opportunity they had had.

"Where is Boisey?" asked Fairfax, when he had found a fairly secluded chair, in one of the smaller reception-rooms. She told him. "I have two weeks' freedom!" she added, with the exultant look of a child in her eyes.

"And what are you going to do with it?"

For all answer, she lifted her eyes and looked at him.

And as his own eyes answered back, something of the fire in hers was reflected in his. Her constant and most wonderful devotion was beginning to tell on him. He was very lonely. He was there simply on the chance of seeing her, for of late that chance had seemed the only thing worth striving for. She was beautiful, with that look of rapt devotion on her. What an inspiration she might have been!

As if reading his thoughts, she said: "The violin? Do you love it as you did?"

He shook his head. Viola, his wife, had had no soul for music.

"I have not touched it in months."

Her face grew radiant. "It is waiting for me to awaken it!" she whispered. "I will inspire you, Rodney. You shall play for me—only for me!" Her tone was passionate and imperious; and, without warning, both were taken back to that death-bed scene in the old homestead on the Hudson. Both seemed to hear the dying woman's command: "Play! Let nothing come between me and the music I love. Play!"

Dorothy shuddered. "It is retribution. Her curse did fall. She loved you, Rodney—and I—and I, I blamed her! Heaven! can I forgive myself that I blamed her?"

The brilliant crowds were surging round them; the hum of voices, women's laughter, men's deeper tones, echoed about them, but they heard them not. Dorothy Boisey saw only her dead mother's face, heard only her voice. Rodney Fairfax saw only Dorothy.

"I must see you again!" he said hoarsely. "Give me a list of your engagements. It will be possible sometimes, perhaps."

Her eyes were dim, as she looked up at him: "There is a fatality over us. It is no use, Rodney. Do what we will, we are doomed."

"Nonsense!" he said irritably. He was only beginning to realize his desire. He would not be balked by morbid scruples. "I shall see you at the Foster ball, the night after to-morrow. Keep some blanks for me on your programme!"

New acquaintances claimed Mrs. Boisey. Fair-

fax mingled with the crowd, and was soon lost in it.

Never had Mrs. Boisey looked more charming than at the Foster ball. She was discretion itself. She did not care to dance much, as Mr. Boisey was not with her; and the impression as to the devotion of husband and wife was greatly confirmed. Half a dozen dances had run out, before she allowed herself to sit one out with Fairfax.

"I had not thought you so careful of conventionalities!" he said rather angrily, as he seated himself by her, in a charmingly arranged palm-hidden nook, *à deux*. He had been chafing at the delay. She smiled upon him, as one would on an impatient child.

"I could not afford to throw away the results of months of hard labor in a minute. You don't realize how I have worked for this, how I have sacrificed myself! Now I am rewarded."

He leant over her, and looked at her unrebuked; caressing her with his glance, but not touching her, yet.

For several moments they did not speak, then his hand closed on hers; his lips passed lightly across her hair.

"Rodney," she whispered, "the old house on the Thames, is it yours still?"

"Yes!" he answered back in tones as low as hers. "I kept it always for your sake. It has been closed—for long. I pay a caretaker to open it up once in a while. It must be almost a ruin."

"I want to see it again. My happy days were there. You must take me there, Rodney."

"But—how? Is it possible you will go there with me—alone?"

"No!" she said. "How could I? I must find some tame cat to play propriety. We will have a *partie-carrée*, my friend. Let me arrange it. I have two people in my mind's eye, who will not object to a little time to themselves; it will only be good-natured on my part to afford them the chance!"

"Who are they?"

"Oh, a pair of benighted lovers, who have confided in me. I shall enjoy playing fairy god-mother, for once—and how they will bless me!"

"What a clever woman you are!" he murmured.

"You are only beginning to wake up to my virtues!" she laughed.

"Yes, now that it is too late. Where is this to end, Dorothy?"

"We shall drift with the current, my friend; when there is no longer any outlet for it, that will be the end."

She was an embodied fatalism, as she spoke, and although the man's instinct revolted at her calm acceptance of the future, the artistic, sensitive side of his nature shared her belief.

"We are traitors, both of us. Do you ever think how the world of honest men and women regard such treachery?"

"No The world is nothing to me,"

Some better instinct moved him then. It told him that he was a coward, a selfish cur, to let this woman ruin herself for him; to rob her of a husband's honorable name after that husband's wonderful chivalry—and for what? True he would marry her, if Boisey gave him the chance; but would Boisey take his freedom? Would he not insist on adhering to his scheme of salvation to the end? This thought had been running in his mind much these past days. It prompted him to speak:

“Dorothy, why do you say the world is nothing to you? You have a good place in it. Are you counting the risk? Am I worth it? No, do not misjudge me”—he read aright the swift suspicion on her face—“I am not thinking of myself. I have nothing to lose. I have only myself to consider—but you. Dorothy, let me go before it is too late. After to-night I will leave you!” He was too agitated to continue; his hands were trembling; she let her eyes rest on him:

“After to-night you will not be able to leave me.”

They continued to gaze at each other in silence, and it seemed to the man as if his soul were going from him in an agony of love, desire and remorse.

A sigh that was almost a sob broke from him: “God help us—I fear not!”

The distant sounds from the orchestra in the gallery over the ballroom reached them fitfully; now and then a woman's laugh rose and fell melodiously, but they heard it not. They saw only the

passion-white face each of the other—his full of something deeper than man's triumph of conquest; it had, in it man's misery of the fall; but hers was calm, radiant.

"I knew that you would come to me—at last!" she murmured.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THREE days after, as Mr. and Mrs. Boisey sat at breakfast, the former said: "What are your plans for to-day, madame?"

She had never been more amiable than of late. She had laid great stress on the decorum of her behavior and the admiring comments people had passed upon it, which had gratified him immensely. Each morning she had given him the programme for the day, and this morning she made no exception to the rule.

It was a morning lovely as any that mid-April ever brought—the sky deeply blue, with little fleecy clouds here and there, as soft and harmless as a baby's cheek. Dorothy herself seemed in harmony with the morning, so dainty and fresh did she look.

"What am I going to do?" she smiled. "Let me tell you. I am going to play the good Samaritan to-day. For once in my life I am going to sacrifice myself on the altar of charity!"

"You are! For whom?" Her good humor was infectious. He smiled back at her.

"To an unfortunate pair of lovers. Don't you remember noticing a very pretty girl, Louise Lesser, at the Lacys? Yes? I thought you would. I have seen a good deal of her lately. I felt sorry for her. She seemed sad so often. She gave me her confidence. It seems her people are not treating her kindly. They object to her lover, who is really charming, but from *their* point of view quite poor; and they are trying to force her to marry that horrid old rake, Stonehurst. The girl can rarely communicate with her sweetheart. Ergo—she is coming to spend the day with me. We are going down to Richmond. It may perhaps happen that Monsieur—Mademoiselle's *adoré*—may find himself in that neighborhood, which would be quite romantic, and perfectly proper, as Madame Boisey will be there to chaperon. Isn't that a charming scheme, and shall I not return laden with blessings this evening?"

"Well, if you are quite sure you are really promoting the young people's happiness, not giving them a tantalizing glimpse of Paradise, from which they will henceforth be excluded!"

"Oh, that is so like you, throwing cold water on my poor little efforts!" she pouted.

"Now, Dorothy, that is not just!" he expostulated. "I am glad for you to be interested in any way you please. Make a happy day for these young people, and be happy with them. I would have you always happy, if I could, Dorothy."

"Derwent, I know!" she said quickly, touched by the memory of all that he had done for her. 1

"Don't you think you are working too hard?" she continued with a spasm of generosity: "Why not take an hour or two off, and go and see the Baldwins, for instance?"

"I think not. I must wait till this is off my mind."

"Off your mind!" she retorted. "Rehearsals begin next week. Then it will be more on your mind than ever. Go and lunch with them. You are *persona grata* there, *I know!*" she laughed with an arch suggestion, which partly annoyed, partly flattered him. "Now promise me!" she urged, as he went towards the door. For some inexplicable reason, she felt it would lessen her sense of deception, if she could persuade him to seek the society of the only woman who had ever roused in her even a faint jealousy.

"Well, perhaps, I will," he said, amused at her persistency. "If you were home I would come and lunch with you," he added.

"Ah, to-morrow, perhaps. I must see what I can arrange," she laughed back gayly.

Three hours later—a cloudless sky, a stretch of lawn, soft as velvet, reaching clear to the water's edge; trees brilliant with their spring leafage; windows flung wide open; comfortable chairs on the veranda opening on all this beauty; and a woman, standing, with rapt face, drinking it in, as if with every breath she drew new life was being absorbed: by her side, a man watching her, silent, expectant. And away on the river a happy pair of lovers, blessing, and at the same time rather

pitying, their kind fairy for being left alone with their somewhat gloomy host.

"Ah!" sighed Dorothy, stretching out her arms to the landscape. "I feel that I could gather every blade of grass, every dear leaf on the trees, to my breast, so full it is of sweet memory. How have I ever lived away? Here everything speaks to me of you. Do you remember that night, when you had played my senses away, and I followed you down to the river; how it shone in the moonlight, and a nightingale sang, do you remember? And you nearly killed me with your cruelty! Going away, you said, without me; it was like a knife-thrust, Rodney! The world was all black to me; it maddened me to know how little you cared! But then, when the nightingale began to sing, and you saw my sorrow, you were touched; do you remember, Rodney? and for a moment you loved me. Ah, why did I let you go?"

"That is where the mistake was! I ought never to have left you!" he echoed gloomily. He was in a strange contrast of mood to hers. She was recklessly gay; he somber, restrained.

She put out her hand. "Come!" she commanded. "Let us go through the house; into every dear room—the only place that speaks to me of *home*."

Hand in hand they passed within; into every room they went, and by her will, into the library, last of all.

"Ah, I thought, nay, I knew I should find it

here!" she said, touching with loving hands the violin case. She opened it, and still with that same caressing touch, she lifted the instrument out, and gave it to him.

"Play to me. Let your soul speak to mine, as it did that night so long ago!"

For an hour or more he obeyed her. At first, it seemed, his touch had lost beyond recall. The beautiful, singing quality that had been his was there no longer; the few hours of practice he had given in preparation for this day could not make up for months of neglect. But gradually something of his former power returned, as inspiration came to him. Full of passion his playing grew, and atoned for here and there a faulty execution, a thin quality of tone.

She lay back in the deep armchair, which had been his in former days, silent, absorbed. And still he played on, and gradually a weird, passionately rebellious theme—a thread at first, it seemed—became apparent in the music; fitfully it moaned across the strings, then grew and strengthened, till finally, it resolved itself into a song of tremendous intensity. As the strings sobbed forth their burden, it was as if a living soul was being forced to reveal the wrack and stress of some terrific struggle. Dorothy sat forward in her chair, her hands clasped on its arms, her form tense, her eyes fastened, as if fascinated, on Fairfax's face. It seemed that he was playing under some influence outside of himself; obeying some force he could not resist. And to

Dorothy, it was as if her dead mother was in the room, between them—a living barrier.

“Away from my sight, lest I curse you; how dared you come between me and what I desired!”

Surely she could *hear* the words. She felt crushed with a suffocating sense of pain. She put her hands before her face, for at the moment, so strong was the influence of the music, she feared to *see* the face of the dead Lenore. And even as the pictured memory of the face grew upon her mind, so grew with it the remembrance of the horrible injustice shown by the dead woman to her child, and with that remembrance strength returned to Dorothy.

She rose from her seat, and swiftly crossed over to him. With rough, imperious hands she stopped him, took the violin from him and laid it back in its case. He let her take it unresisting. He had the look of a man awakened from a dream.

“How could you? How dared you?” she demanded angrily. “Had you no other song to sing to me? Listen to me. I refuse to let that dead woman, who was no mother to me, who dying had only a curse to leave me, stand between you and me. If you had loved her, then she would have had the right, had she the power, to make her soul speak to you—to claim you. But I defy her! I will not let her stand between us. I forbid you to sing her messages to me. I feel I never want to hear your bow drawn across the strings again. I had thought they would have sung a song of life and love for the living—not a

passionate wail from the unsatisfied dead! It was cruel! It was hideous!"

She burst into a storm of weeping. But now he had recovered himself. He flung himself down on his knees beside her; he drew her close to him.

"Forgive me!" he said. "I was conscious of nothing but a horrible pain, a pain so strong, that I felt, if I did not voice it through the strings, it would suffocate me. I do not know what possessed me. I thought only to make the strings sing, what I have, as yet, not dared to tell you—I love you—I love you—at last—my own!" He rose to his feet, gently pulling her up with him, and they stood, face to face. "Nothing shall stand between us now!" He drew her towards the table where the violin lay. "No more wailing songs from the dead disturb us——" And before she could stay him, he had hurled the instrument violently to the floor, and stamped upon it. There it lay between them, broken, and Dorothy shuddered.

He took her hands, and raised her arms to his neck. "Life," he whispered, "it shall be life for us—life and love. Listen to me, Dorothy; when you are ready, I shall be waiting! Don't keep me too long! You love the sea—how often have you spoken to me of the songs it sings to you—let us listen to them together! Those which I can not comprehend you shall translate to me! Dorothy . . . Dorothy . . . My new yacht is a beauty—how I should love to have you tread her deck with me . . . in the warmth of the sun by day, under the moonlight by night, Dorothy! Think of it

. . . dream of it . . . to-night . . . when you are alone. I will have her put in commission at once, ready at an hour's notice, to sail at my lady's command. Dorothy, what ails you? Do you not hear?"

A half-sobbing breath caught in her throat. "I hear—not you—but that death-dirge——"

Although the sun shone brightly still through the open windows, Dorothy shivered, as if the shadow of death still lingered in the room.

From over the lawn came the sound of happy laughter.

"Go to them, Rodney, I can not see them yet. Keep them amused; they must not see me agitated."

As he passed out through the open window, she went to a mirror, and looked at herself. Not thus had she expected to look, to feel, when Rodney loved her. This face, looking at her from the mirror, was the face of a woman who had passed through some recent agony—not the face of a woman who had attained the summit of her happiness. She had thought, that when once she had heard the words she hungered for from her lover's lips, had felt his arms about her, with love's clasp, that happiness beyond description would be hers; but now she felt miserable, looked it.

She was frightened at herself. She did not recognize her mood. All at once she felt she dared no longer stay in that room alone. She would shriek, or become delirious, if she did. She

ran to the door, with nervous hands she unfastened it. She hurried up the stairs to the room that once had been hers. It was just as she left it. Once safely there, her nervousness left her. She flung up her head. "Again I can breathe!" She inspected herself before the glass. She rubbed her cheeks with her handkerchief, color returned. "Ah, that is better now—Mrs. Boisey! You can challenge public gaze!" She addressed herself with a half-mocking sneer.

For the remainder of the day she was gay as usual, playing the chaperon with almost too rigid an adherence to propriety, the lovers thought regretfully. Not once did she remain alone with Fairfax again that day.

CHAPTER XXIX

LADY CARSTAIRS was frankly and unaffectedly glad to see Derwent Boisey.

"I am only sorry," she said, "that my mother is not home to-day. She is lunching with the Lacys. By the way, we met Mrs. Boisey there only last week. She told us how every moment of your time is taken up with the new play. So we had made up our minds that we should not get even a glimpse of you, till after its production. We are looking forward to the event; we have secured seats already—a month in advance. Is not that a compliment?"

"Indeed, yes!" he assented, intensely gratified. "I shall be glad when it is over, the new venture safely launched. Mrs. Boisey herself suggested that I should call upon you to-day. [Not for the first time, she noticed that Boisey never alluded to Dorothy as "my wife," but always as Mrs. Boisey.] She thought I needed an hour or so of relaxation. In fact she urged me so that I determined to give myself the pleasure. All work, etc." He was quite surprised to observe the sudden reserve which crept over Lady Carstairs' face, the indefinable cooling of her manner. He felt instinctively that he had committed some blunder, but he knew not what. He could not tell that Violet Carstairs disliked to feel that she owed the pleasure of his visit to another woman's pleading; could not tell that she was not only surprised, but almost humiliated on realizing what a pleasure it was, and how reluctant to recognize that it was not a spontaneous tribute to her own charm.

It was not until they had been seated at the luncheon table some minutes that she recovered her serenity.

"Tell me about your work," she said, "or would you rather put away all thought of it for an hour? That would be best," she added, seeing the relief on his face. "How stupid of me even to refer to it, but you must forgive me, for I am really interested in the coming play. Now I promise not another word on the subject." She smiled on him, quite restored to her usual man-

ner. And again there stole over the tired writer that wonderful sense of rest, which always came to him in her presence. They talked of art, of literature, of people spoken of and admired in the dramatic world, of odds and ends of happenings in society. Not once did the conversation become personal, yet when he left, Boisey carried away a delightful and comforting sense of confidential, intimate friendship. He went back to his work strengthened and refreshed. Gibbon noticed it: "I should advise you to take your lunch at the same place every day!" he remarked dryly.

Boisey laughed; a happy laugh, like a school-boy's: "I wish I could!" he said. Then immediately after his face darkened, and he did not laugh again. Gibbon rubbed his forefinger gently up and down the side of his nose, a trick he had, when thinking—and said no more.

"You look very tired!" Boisey said to Dorothy, when she returned that evening, about half-past nine.

"I am tired—tired out," she assented.

"Have you had a happy day?" he asked, as he took her wrap from her. A strange look swept over her face.

"I have had a wretched day. Don't ask me about it."

"And the lovers?"

"Oh, they are happy enough!" she answered contemptuously.

"Well, since that was your object?" he paused; he was a little puzzled at her manner. She be-

came aware of it, and putting herself on her guard, answered, yawning:

"Playing the Samaritan is very tiresome work. It doesn't seem to have agreed with me. I feel as cross as a bear. I am going straight to bed. Good-night, Derwent."

After she had left him, Boisey remained for some moments in deep thought. Something indefinable in her manner revealed to him what a quicksand was this woman's nature. He had trusted her of late; but all at once the old suspicions rose, his confidence was shaken—he knew not by what; but as in the past, he had learnt to read the coming changes in her temperament by the slightest signs, so now, he felt himself taken back with a shock to those wretched New York days; and instinctively he knew that the danger signal was hoisting. Yet what could he do? His time would not be his own for the next month. After that they would go away somewhere—travel. He would be with her constantly. With a sharp sting, memory told him, even so had he planned once before. The old habit of doubt came back upon him, with redoubled intensity. How did he know if she told him the truth about her movements? Where had she been this day? Had she really taken the young people with her?

That doubt was set at rest the very next morning; for as he was descending the steps of his house, he saw Louise Lesser advancing rapidly towards it. "How is dear Mrs. Boisey? Not tired out after yesterday, I hope? We had a de-

lightful time, Mr. Boisey! Can I see her? Is she up?"

Mr. Boisey drew a deep breath of relief, as he assured Miss Lesser that he was charmed to hear of her enjoyment, and that Mrs. Boisey was up.

"I must be getting nervous and out of sorts!" he said to himself, as he went on his way. "She has given me no cause to doubt her for a long time past. Of course she was tired. It could have been no joke for her, looking after that young pair of spoons." So consoled, he went to his work with renewed vigor.

After Louise Lesser left her, Dorothy sat down and wrote to Fairfax:

"I can not see you to-day, perhaps not even to-morrow. I can not tell when. I am unnerved by what happened yesterday. A shadow is on me. I feel as if death had touched me. Not even the knowledge of your love rouses me to-day. I am tired—cold. Something has gone from me. I respond to nothing. Has her curse really fallen? At the moment of realization, did her spirit come to me in the music, and take away the power to feel? That is what I am asking myself. Until I can answer that question do not seek to see me—do not ask me to come to you. Dorothy."

She went out and herself mailed the letter. She wondered then what she should do next. She wandered on, restless, ill at ease. The streets appeared all alike to her—gray, hideous, like her

life's to-day. She had walked perhaps half an hour, not looking with cognizant glance at such outwardly practical forms as men and women, streets and houses, too consumed was she with the fever of introspection. Suddenly she found herself entering upon a square—a typical London square. The young green of the budding trees attracted her vagrant fancy; the perfume of hyacinths, tulips and daffodils stole faintly seductive on the springlike air; her attention was arrested. With an impatient sigh she looked around; she recognized the locality. Her lips tightened in an unpleasant line, then broke away into an equally unpleasant smile. In the last house but one on the south side of the Square lived Lady Carstairs—Violet Carstairs. Derwent admired her; the fact had more than once annoyed rather than amused her. Violet Carstairs . . . a whimsical fancy seized her. She would call and see her; she might find some distraction from this horrible, grinding misery, corroding her very heart-strings. Victim of impulse as ever, she obeyed the unaccountable fancy, but almost regretted having done so, when she had rung the door bell and found she was committed irrevocably.

“Yes, her ladyship was at home.” Mrs. Boisey followed the servant and was ushered into a cheerful looking morning-room, opening off the hall. In a few moments Lady Carstairs entered, but with all her good breeding, she could not help the surprise she felt showing itself momentarily

in her eyes. Quickly as it was conquered, Dorothy saw it, and winced under it.

"How very good of you to come and see me without ceremony!" said Violet Carstairs, smiling cordially. "I have often wondered why you have treated us as almost strangers. Mr. Boisey is such an old friend that, naturally, we felt always ready to welcome his wife!"

"You are very kind, Lady Carstairs. You must have thought me ungrateful. But I was always erratic. To one of your well-balanced mind, I must be quite a disagreeable enigma!" In an indefinable way, such as only a woman can employ, she made Violet feel that a well-balanced mind must be rather an unenviable possession.

"Oh, you must not think of us in that way. It is quite possible to admire, even what one does not understand!"

Mrs. Boisey regarded Lady Carstairs curiously. She realized the contrast between them. What a pity Derwent had not set his affections on this charming young widow. She would have suited him admirably. She knew he admired her, and it annoyed her to know it. Although she did not want him herself, she wanted no other woman to have any of his thought. She became aware that she herself, in her turn, was being studied. She laughed amusedly.

"What are you thinking of me? What am I thinking of you? One thought of yours I can guess at, Lady Carstairs! You are saying to yourself: Why has she come? And really I can't

answer that myself. Mr. Boisey admires you so much, perhaps that was partly the reason. And, of course, I object to his thinking any one but Mrs. Boisey admirable!" She felt she was talking nonsense, but as she saw the gravely astonished look on Violet's face, the slightly heightened color, she felt impelled to go on.

"Mr. Boisey told me what a delightful time he had with you yesterday. He owes that to me. I positively had to *insist* on his coming, although he declared, that had I been home, he would have come back to lunch with me, sans invitation. It is terribly tiresome to have such a devoted husband, don't you think?"

"I never found Sir Geoffrey's devotion tiresome!" answered Lady Carstairs quietly.

"No! Well *I* did!" laughed Mrs. Boisey. "Poor Sir Geoffrey! How glad I was when he fell in love with you!"

Lady Carstairs did not answer, only her eyes rested on the other's with a mixture of disdain and pity.

"Forgive me!" cried Dorothy penitently. "It was horribly indelicate of me. I always seem to show myself at my worst, when with you."

"Let us change the subject," suggested Violet. "Tell me of Mr. Boisey's play. Are you not immensely interested in it? Will you not be glad when the first night is over?"

"The play?" pouted Mrs. Boisey. "I am sick to death of the play. I breakfast, lunch, and dine on it, it seems to me. [Which was very unjust

of her, and somewhat wanting in veracity, as a statement!] I know every line of it. It is good—very good. It will be a huge success, I hope. Mr. Boisey deserves some consolation”

Violet looked up quickly at the last words. Dorothy had let them fall unconsciously, and was now looking dreamily away, evidently not thinking of the impression they might make. And Violet Carstairs felt her own suspicions as to Derwent Boisey's sorrow confirmed.

“I, too, hope it will be a triumph. We shall be there. And, of course, we shall see you there?”

“Yes, I shall be there, I suppose.”

There was no certainty, no enthusiasm in her tone, and again Lady Carstairs wondered. Suddenly Dorothy looked up, and fixed her eyes on the other's face:

“Fate has not treated either of us very kindly,” she said. “Heavens! if we knew beforehand, what cruel blows she can deal, we should not have strength to live. You believe in God, and all things pure and beautiful, I remember! Then how can you reconcile the fact that the most beautiful gift of all given to us poor mortals here below, the gift that should lift us nearer to Heaven than aught besides, is withholden from some, taken from others, and to some of us is given only as a pain—a pain so agonizing, that it makes life a hell, *not* a heaven; yet a pain so bitter-sweet, that we would not give it up even if we could! How can you reconcile that pain with the idea of a merciful God giving his choicest gift!”

As the words rushed from her, Violet Carstairs knew that in that moment she was looking straight into the soul of the other, and a most womanly pity filled her heart.

"You poor soul!" she said, her voice low and tender. "You are suffering, and because you do not understand. Love such as you speak of suffers because it is selfish; thinking of its own pain, its own unsatisfied desire. That makes it a poison of hell. Love that is love in all its noble glory, has no thought of self, would even crucify itself for the beloved's sake; would bear all things, renounce all things, even love itself for the other's good. That love makes heaven."

"No one ever taught me that lesson. No one ever before spoke to me, as you do; and now it is too late!"

"Too late? No! Do you remember Isabella's words:

" 'Too late? Why, no! I, that do speak a word,

May call it back again.' "

"So you can call back the thoughts, the beliefs that hurt you. Let them give place to the truth."

"Lady Carstairs, I do not know what impels me to talk to you like this. You and I have never been friends. I always felt that you disapproved of me, even if you did not actually dislike me—although I believe I could have made you like me. One thing that must make you merciful to me is, that you have a good mother. I had not. All my memories of her are full of bitterness. A

curse for me was in her *heart*, almost on her *lips* when she died. I was only a child, only sixteen, but that death hour made a woman of me. Then I saw such hideous suffering, as her passion-wrecked soul left its body; was forced to leave the man she loved, but who did not love her, that it is no wonder it left its mark on me. That was my initiation into the mystery of human passion, human love. Is it to be wondered at that I thought of it only as an agony, a shameful one, yet inevitable? That hour robbed me of all sweet, girlish illusions. I never was a girl. That influence is on my life now. But yesterday, it shadowed me as if with death! Lady Carstairs, you can not realize the heritage my mother left me! When I looked upon her dead face, I said to myself. 'Should I ever love as she did, unrequited, it would kill me with the shame of it.' Yet the heritage came to me surely. It was in my blood, part of her, that fatal, passionate, selfish power of loving. You can not know what I have suffered for years—what I am suffering now!"

Violet put out her hand, and took Dorothy's in hers.

"Tell me anything you will. Let me be your friend. If I can help you, ask of me freely—and trust me."

"You are wonderfully good. It is because I realize that you are a good woman, that I yield to the impulse, the first I ever experienced, to confide in a woman. Let me tell you of a woman's case, that I know of—it need not necessarily be

mine, you remember. This woman seems to have had some peculiar fascination. She could and did excite passionate love—save in one instance. The one man in the world she would have died for, did not love her. He was an idealist, an artist. She could not wake the man in him. That was strangely too my mother's case! So this woman, by a stress of circumstances found herself married to a man who adored her, whom she deceived. Ah, Lady Carstairs, there is an instance of the unselfishness of love, that you spoke of—that husband bore all things, and stood loyally by the woman he had married. Well, this woman never conquered her love for the other. It was, and always will be the one absorbing passion of her life. After years of separation they met again, and at last her long devotion has won its object. He loves her. What should she do? You say that Love should crucify itself for the beloved's sake—if that love is wrong—but suppose that involves the crucifixion of the beloved also, the constant misery of two people joined together, but ill-mated? What should she do? Would it not be better for her to go to the man she loves, and leave the other free—for surely he would free himself, and then the others could legalize their union!"

No need to tell Violet Carstairs the parties in this supposititious case. The intensity of Dorothy Boisey, her own knowledge of certain details in her life, and that of Derwent Boisey, made it all too plain. She was conscious of a great pity for

this storm-tossed soul laid bare before her, but of a far greater one for the man, who had stood so faithfully by the woman he had married.

"What should she do?" Dorothy repeated the question insistently, and Lady Carstairs found it difficult to answer.

She was intensely moved by the revelation made to her; swayed too by an admiration for the noble chivalry of manhood exemplified in Derwent Boisey.

"I think," she said at length, "that there can be but one answer, an answer that the lover of this woman, if there be anything of good, of noble manhood in him, should help her to give. He should say to her: 'We are not children to ignore this feeling that is ours—to play with it. We are man and woman—therefore we must admit it, look it in the face, and conquer it. We have not only ourselves to think of. There is the man, who has given you the shield of his name; who has been, by your own showing, a loyal and devoted husband to you; whose only reward has been deception.' How can there be any other answer? Should that woman leave her husband, she leaves him to the reproach of the world, that he could not guard her honor and his own better. What a reward for his faithfulness! Does that woman, of whom you speak, ever think of him, I wonder? And this other man, what sort of love is his, that he would rob her of the honor of a good man's name, and make her—what? nameless, honorless? What do you think yourself of this love, Mrs.

Boisey? Does it seem a great and admirable thing, full of romance and poetry, and beyond the common? To me, it is ignoble and selfish, seeking only its own gratification." A noble indignation glowed in her face, rang in her voice, though it softened into womanly compassion, as Dorothy protested:

"No! No! it is not that! This woman would die, would submit to any suffering, could she add to the happiness of the man she loves. Love is too cold a word. She adores him! She worships him! She has from a girl—he is life of her life. For him and with him, she would suffer poverty, hardship, torture, death. Is that love altogether selfish? She would toil for him, serve him as a slave, give up all the luxury and comfort she has been accustomed to, and go cheerfully with him, into a desert, a wilderness! Is that altogether selfish?"

"Yes, I think so. She would do all this, because of her own gratification in being with him. Oh, don't think, because I can not help seeing the *wrong* of it, that I underrate its power, the suffering it entails on the woman who is the victim of it. Poor soul! Poor soul! My heart aches for her!" Again she laid her hand impulsively on Dorothy's.

"And you feel for me? You understand me a little? You are sorry for me, though you blame me?" said Dorothy, laying aside the fiction of another woman's story.

"I wish I could help you," responded Violet

warmly. "I realize how futile my words must seem. There is one argument that would have been stronger than any I—or all the world—could bring to bear, and that is denied you!"

"And that?"

"A child! A little innocent child! Ah, Mrs. Boisey, had that blessing been yours, you could never have ignored God's hostage to you—could never have broken the link that bound you to everything good and pure. For the sake of what may be, for perhaps, God in His mercy will send you that blessing, won't you pause; won't you try and make yourself worthy of the possibility; give up everything that might stain your thought?"

"Stop!" cried the other. "Stop! A child? A child that should call Derwent Boisey father! No! No! No! a thousand times no! It could not be! I would not have it so! If that had happened to me, I would have killed myself!"

She did not look up, or she might have seen an immensity of anger shadowing Violet's clear eyes, as the heartless confession poured forth.

"I can realize the joy of being the mother of a child of the man you love. Have I not dreamt of it? But otherwise—ah, I should hate it!" Her hands clenched themselves, her eyes glittered hardly; then all at once, she laughed.

"Ah, Lady Carstairs, you think I am mad, unwomanly! Perhaps I am! It amuses me sometimes to know that the world takes Derwent and myself for a model couple. I will tell you, as I have told him, that there are times when I could

worship him for his goodness, and there are times—many more—when I hate it—hate it! If he were a worse man, it would all be so much easier. I have some remnants of decency left in me, and I can not help recognizing his goodness; can not help knowing that my duty is clear; can not help listening to my conscience, sometimes; can not help knowing that you are right when you tell me to think of him. And, oh, God! how miserable I am!" She burst into tears, and again Lady Carstairs felt momentarily softened.

"Ask God to help you. Your own strength is not sufficient. Go to your husband. Tell him all your doubts, your difficulties—ask him to support you."

Dorothy Boisey lifted her tear-stained face, and looked at the other: "Perhaps I will. I make no promise—only I will try. You have been very patient, very kind. You have given me something to think over. You believe in prayer—then pray for me. It may help; I don't know. I feel adrift, and yet in some strange way, I feel it will help me to know that you understand—that you are thinking of me—praying for me!"

"What can I do for you? Will you come and stay with me for a while, or shall we go away to the country for a time. Let me help you fight this out!"

Dorothy smiled sadly. "Thank you for the thought. It is impossible. I must fight my fight alone!"

"Alone? Ah, if I could believe that, Mrs. Boi-

sey. Promise me that it shall be so. Deny yourself to your lover. Each day of denial would give you strength for the next. Deny yourself to him to-morrow, and again the next day, and come to me—and let me help you. Surely it will encourage you to know that another woman is standing by you."

"I will try. I will not promise." So saying, Dorothy went.

Left alone, Violet Carstairs sat in deep thought, for nearly an hour. How plainly she could read the story now. The sudden departure of the Boiseys from London. It seemed so clear to her: Boisey had taken his wife away from the temptation; had exiled himself for her sake. The key to that departure she did not hold. Dorothy had not made full confession. But what she did know seemed to Violet Carstairs sufficient ground on which to honor Boisey. Thinking it all over quietly, mindful of many puzzling phases in their friendship with the writer, deeper and deeper grew her sense of anger, of resentment against the selfishness of the woman, who had accepted all from the man, giving so little in return; and yet her sympathy for that woman's suffering did not lessen, nor the desire to help her. But Boisey? Again and again her thoughts recurred to him. How had he found the courage to go on his way, as if his lot were of the ordinary; never posing as a martyr; never uttering a complaint; always quiet, controlled—apparently, absorbed in his work, and proud of his wife. His wife—

Ah, no wonder he had ever spoken of her as Mrs. Boisey. And Dorothy had laid such stress on his adoration of her. Then what inhuman cruelty on her part, condemning him to such mockery of wedded life! A sudden and most astonishing violent spasm of anger filled Violet's breast. She thought of Sir Geoffrey. She tried to picture his feelings had she so treated him. Then it came upon her with a kind of shock, how dim his image had grown, how little his memory had been with her of late. His picture seemed but a faded pastel, beside the strong and glowing colors in which this living example of modern chivalry stood forth on her mind's canvas.

Then she began to vaguely wonder as to the lover of Mrs. Boisey. Imperceptibly at first, thoughts came and went, shadows from memory's realm; little bits of gossip; an understanding look from one to the other. An idealist! An artist! An artist! An idealist! The words repeated themselves, and without effort she saw vividly the personality of Rodney Fairfax. Dorothy's guardian! Then with a shock—probably the man her mother had loved! Lady Carstairs shuddered, as the whole sad tragedy lay plainly revealed to her.

"I must help her. I must try to save her from herself. I will go to her to-morrow," she told herself, when at length she forced her mind away from the subject, which was not until the return of Mrs. Baldwin.

CHAPTER XXX

MRS. BOISEY did not keep her social engagements that evening. She stayed at home, alone, waiting for Boisey's return. She did a great amount of disconnected, desultory thinking. She was physically and mentally worn out, and in that condition, it seemed to her almost possible to follow the advice of Lady Carstairs to heed the voice of conscience. She was in a quiescent, receptive frame of mind, on Boisey's return; inclined to let things shape themselves; to follow some chance guide, in the way of a word, a thought.

He was surprised to see her. "I did not expect to find you home. I thought some ball or reception claimed you, as usual." He did not speak with any enthusiasm of pleasure. On the contrary, he seemed dispirited and weary; and there was a distinct note of irritability in his voice. Truly he too was worn out. His work had been strangely harassing and elusive that day; a longing for a restful hour in Violet Carstairs' drawing-room had tormented him in the early afternoon hours—a longing which all at once he felt he dared not yield to.

Dorothy noticed and resented his tone at once. It piqued her vanity, always ready to rise to the surface.

"At least you might pretend to be pleased!" she said crossly.

He looked at her quietly: "The days for pretense passed long since between you and me. If I could flatter myself that you had remained at home on my account, I should feel, not pretend, pleasure. Are you not well? or only tired?"

He sank wearily into a chair, as he asked the question, and Dorothy regarded him curiously. There was no affectation in his want of interest. She might have been a mile away, for all the response he made to her presence. She eyed him critically. He seemed to have aged lately. There were added streaks of gray in his hair. He looked like a man in need of sleep. It was all so prosaic. How could she keep it up day after day? In a week she would hate him and herself!

"What are you thinking of?" she asked suddenly. He gazed at her with a well-defined impatience.

"Nothing that would interest you," he answered quietly. In truth his mind was revolving round a knotty question of detail, upon which he and Gibbon had been unable to agree. But Dorothy, womanlike, jumped to another conclusion.

"I believe you were thinking of Violet Carstairs! I believe you are half in love with her!"

"How dare you?" he said angrily, annoyed to feel her remorseless touch upon a spot sacred to himself. "Have I ever given you cause to harbor such a thought?" he went on with increasing irritability. "Can't you see that I am worn out with work—I was thinking of it when you spoke. There are one or two things hard to decide, and

yet they mean so much." He was conscious himself of the want of sympathy in his tone; he saw her face harden; knew that disagreeable words were imminent, and to-night he felt he could not bear them. It was an unfortunate thing, that this night of all others, his patience and his physical strength should suddenly have given out. But so it generally happens. One half hour of physical and mental weariness may, without premeditation, undo the work of years.

"Don't explain!" said Mrs. Boisey coldly. "I will leave you to regain your amiability. You will probably succeed better without me." So saying she went from the room, closing the door behind her.

Boisey looked at the closed door.

"Good Heavens! What have I done, or said?" he muttered. An impulse seized him to go after her; to soften his apparent roughness. It passed, and left him still there. The opportunity had gone; and an opportunity lost is something we can never overtake.

Lady Carstairs and Mrs. Baldwin had finished breakfast the next morning, the latter reading over the morning paper, while her daughter sat, deeply thoughtful, her hands clasped one over the other. Mrs. Baldwin, receiving, after a time, the impression of concentrated silence, looked up at Lady Carstairs, questioningly, but without speaking. They understood one another, these two.

Violet smiled. "You were wondering what oc-

cupied my thoughts? You will be surprised, perhaps, when I tell you, that I was thinking of Mrs. Boisey. I am going over to see her, mother. I may remain to lunch, or I may bring her back with me. If the latter, make her welcome, and ask no questions, dear. She needs our friendship, our sympathy."

Mrs. Baldwin nodded in acquiescence, but wisely controlled the sudden curiosity she felt.

When an hour later, Violet was shown into Mrs. Boisey's presence she was shocked at the havoc visible in her face. She must have suffered cruelly during the night.

"You poor soul! how ill you look!" murmured Lady Carstairs. "You have suffered!"

"Ah yes—suffered, suffered until my whole being has seemed one vast pain. If it goes on like this every day and every night, I do not know how I am to bear it, Lady Carstairs."

"You can not bear it alone. You must let me help you. Come with me for a few days, a week. We can run down to Brighton, if you will. You must get away from here. You must not sit and think alone."

"But the gossip! What would people say?"

"What can they say? My name, my reputation, both are strong enough to bear the burden of any gossip. If Lady Carstairs is feeling run down, a little nervous, what more natural than that she should need the bracing sea air for a time? What more natural than that she should wish a friend to share her solitude. Voilà!"

"Yes! But we have never been friends—never have been considered such!" objected Mrs. Boisey.

"The opportunity never arose before. Now we understand each other better. Your objections are futile, Mrs. Boisey, for I intend to carry you off, whether you will or no!"

"But your engagements?"

"They can easily be arranged. My mother will make excuses for me. There is only one engagement we must not break—the forthcoming first-night."

So Dorothy allowed herself to be persuaded. And the evening of the next day found her established with Lady Carstairs, down at Brighton, in a comfortable suite of rooms, from the large front windows of which, they looked directly on the sea.

The whole affair had been a source of immense bewilderment and gratification to Derwent Boisey. He felt a load of responsibility taken from him, a sense of freedom, of rest. Then he argued that a week of quiet intimacy with such a woman as Violet Carstairs, must of necessity prove beneficial to Dorothy. He hoped great results. If she had been able to win the friendship of a woman of the type of Lady Carstairs, it proved that there must be something of good in her. That she had given her confidence to Violet, he never once suspected. It was the last thing he would have expected of her. He had been rather troubled once and again by the recurring thought of his brusqueness to her on that evening before

she left. The subject had not been referred to between them, and their parting had been matter of fact to a degree.

"I shall not write to you, and please do not write to me," she had said. "I want a complete change, or so Lady Carstairs thinks. As I shall be with her, you need feel no uneasiness at not hearing from me directly. No news will be good news!" These were the last words she said to him, as he stood at the door of their railway compartment, for he had come to see them off. He made no objection, but he surprised a look of pain in Lady Carstairs' eyes, which in a vague way comforted him.

Then steam was up; there was a banging of doors, hurrying of guards and porters, and the train moved slowly out of the station.

"I declare," said Violet, two days later, as they sat at lunch, "you are wonderfully improved already. Your color has returned—your eyes are brighter—you look ten years younger!"

Dorothy smiled. Flattery always delighted her.

"It is all thanks to you. I had no idea one woman could be so good, so considerate to another. What I admire in you is, that you don't try to underrate my trouble, you only try to heal it.

"Well, I hope I have a little common-sense. One doesn't heal a sore by covering it up! But it does me good to hear you, when you admit yourself that you are stronger."

The two women got on better together, than either had dared to hope. The weather was charming, and they spent almost their entire time out of doors. Four days passed, and Lady Carstairs was just feeling that she dared congratulate herself on the success of her experiment. She knew that no communication had passed between Mrs. Boisey and Fairfax, for the former had left word with her maid that positively no mail should be forwarded to her. It had cost her a tremendous effort to do this, for she knew that the note she had written would provoke a passionate protest on his part, and she hungered for the sight of his handwriting; but she honestly meant to be true to her resolve to give Lady Carstairs' experiment a fair trial.

The novelty of it, the complete change of atmosphere, the freedom from daily intercourse with Derwent, and her own good intention, combined at first to keep her strung up to a high tension. She appreciated herself, and what seemed to be the nobility of her own purpose. All went well for four days. On the fifth day, Lady Carstairs was prostrated with a violent neuralgic headache, brought on by a sudden change in the weather the night before, when the wind had veered round to the east, bringing with it a big drop in the temperature.

Mrs. Boisey was full of sympathy. "You must just rest quietly, and not think of me. I will do what you wish. Shall I sit here and read to you? Or would you rather be alone?"

When Lady Carstairs admitted that she would prefer to be alone, Dorothy acquiesced. "I shall go for a good sharp walk, and when I return I hope I shall find you better. If not I shall insist upon finding a doctor."

Violet smiled. "Then, indeed, I must fight this off. Go out and enjoy your walk. I have no doubt I shall be fairly better by the time you come back."

So Dorothy started out alone.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT was rather a storm-promising morning. The sun shone fitfully, and shadowing clouds frequently obscured the blue of the sky. The water looked gray and cold, and broke fretfully on the beach. The atmospheric conditions had a depressing effect on Mrs. Boisey. She walked hurriedly along, looking neither to right nor left. When she had left the esplanade and sauntering visitors behind, and found herself out in the open, with nothing but the sea stretching far out on her right, and the changing clouds over head, the chill wind blowing round her, a sense of isolation and loneliness crept over her, overwhelmed her. She almost laughed as she thought of these four days just gone; how she had cheated herself into the belief that they were real; that she was actually living in them. It was as if one went to see Duse

in Camille, and at the end of the third act, found oneself suddenly pitchforked into a scene from a modern vaudeville show, without rhyme or reason, having all one's mental atmosphere convulsed before the last act of the tragedy.

For the last act had to come. She had always known it to be inevitable. These four days had only been a cheat, a delusion. She had not been living them. She had only been playing them.

They had been a sort of mental and physical narcotic, but like all narcotics they had only dulled the pain, not killed it. Only death could do that. From the temporary sleep, the giant of her need rose up with redoubled strength. She must see him. It was her soul's cry. She could not pass another twenty-four hours with Violet Carstairs, sympathetic and dear as she had proved herself.

She must see him. Thought of him possessed her. It seemed to her that he must know it, must be moved to come to her. She heard footsteps behind her, but so absorbed was she in her own imaginings that she felt no nervousness, though it was lonely walking now; did not even turn her head to see who was overtaking her.

So absolutely was she wrapt in the thought of him, that she did not even start, when he spoke to her.

"Dorothy! I have tracked you at last!"

"So! It is you!" she said, putting her hands in his, joy radiating from her, enveloping him in its warmth. "I was thinking of you; I knew you

would come!" she continued in a happy whisper. "Did you feel me near you? Were you conscious of my longing for you?"

"I have never lost consciousness of my need of you! How could you be so cruel, Dorothy? None of my letters answered! No clue to your whereabouts! Nothing but that cruel note to say you would not see me. It was only by chance, that I heard yesterday of your being here with Lady Carstairs. I got in this morning. I watched your hotel, I saw you come out alone. I followed you. You must never run away from me again, Dorothy. I never thought you could torture me so!"

Each word he spoke intoxicated her. Never had she thought to listen to such genuine lover's plaint from him. They sat down side by side on the cliff, and looked deeply, hungrily into each other's eyes. Dorothy grew deliriously happy.

"And you have suffered—for me?" she murmured.

"Yes! I have suffered. Does that please you?"

"It intoxicates me. I never knew what happiness was before! Tell me that you love me, Rodney."

"I love you!"

.. "Truly?"

"Passionately! I am mad, beside myself for you!"

"Ah!"

It was only a whisper of sound, but it sang love's burden, as surely as more articulate note.

"You must come to me, Dorothy, without delay."

"To-day, if you will."

"You are mine! You have no regret? no compunction?"

"None! I am yours, body and soul. With you I live. You are my life! Without you is death!"

"Dorothy, do you see that white sail over there to the right? The yacht lying at anchor there is mine. Do you remember I spoke of her to you that day in the old house at Twickenham? I told you she should be waiting at her lady's service. She waits—ready to bear us, dear, whither you will. I thought that would please you. I have provided everything for your comfort. There need be no delay. The boat which brought me ashore, waits to take us aboard. You will not keep me waiting? Come!"

"I will come—but we must go far away—far further than the yacht can take us. Together we will tread new earth. See, how well I remember your liking, Rodney, your infatuation for the great solitudes of nature; the wild, trackless wastes, the untrodden forest lands. Ah, they call to *me* now! I too want to get close to nature, with you by my side. Together we shall listen to the throbbing of the great mother's bosom, beating in unison with our own! Sea, sky, sweet-smelling earth, flower-scented breezes, and the song of birds, all—all shall chant our nuptial

anthem, one great harmony with the you and me! Ah! It will be life— life! Yes, I will come— now—and together we will plan our future. Let us go!" She put her hands in his, and both rising, they stood, face to face, looking each at the other; then silently they turned, retracing their steps towards the pier and the waiting boat. The sea washed against the cliffs with an angry moan, but the sun still shone at intervals. A church clock gave out the hour. It was three of the afternoon.

Before they reached the pier, he said: "You have suggested a plan to me, unwittingly. Yes, we will go far—to the Antipodes even! Shall it be, Dorothy?"

"Even to the end of the world!" she made answer.

"So be it!" he responded, with a certain solemnity as if taking oath. They had no need of many words.

He bade her walk leisurely on to the pier, and there await him. Half an hour subsequently he joined her there. In the interval he had dispatched an important telegram, the contents of which he told her later.

CHAPTER XXXII

ABOUT four o'clock of the same day, Derwent Boisey received a telegram from Lady Carstairs. It ran: "Come at once. Important."

He hastily put together his papers, despatched a hurried message to Gibbon; sent for a cab, and in less than twenty minutes was being driven to Victoria Station, where he took the next train to Brighton.

"What has happened? Is Mrs. Boisey ill?" he questioned hurriedly, as he shook hands with Lady Carstairs. She was looking very pale and agitated, he noticed, and dread of he knew not what gripped his nerves.

"Mr. Boisey I thought it best to send for you. Mrs. Boisey left me this morning, shortly after lunch saying she was going for a sharp walk. She seemed much happier. I felt no uneasiness. I was suffering from headache, and could not go with her—and—she has not returned. Oh, Mr. Boisey, you do not know what anxiety I have suffered!"

Boisey's face was very grave, but he answered her kindly, almost tenderly.

"Dear Lady Carstairs don't alarm yourself too much. You are not so accustomed to Mrs. Boisey's erraticisms as I. She will probably stroll in later, and be quite oblivious of the fact that she has caused you any anxiety." He could not

keep the bitterness of remembrance entirely out of his voice. It told Violet Carstairs so much. What this man must have endured!

"My maid has been out several times, hoping to see her. She is out even now. I shall never cease to reproach myself, for letting her go alone, if anything has happened. She offered to stay with me, to read to me. Why did I not keep her! She has been wonderfully patient, and I was feeling that she was growing stronger, better able to resist temptation, to fight down, perhaps to conquer it——" She paused suddenly, aware of the searching intentness of Boisey's regard.

"Then she has confided in you?" he asked quietly, not knowing whether he was more pained or relieved.

Violet met his gaze frankly: "She has told me a great deal, and I feel for you both. Mr. Boisey, you will not think me impertinent, if I tell that I feel so greatly for you. I can understand what the trial has been, and I think you have behaved nobly, nobly!"

There was a new note in her voice, which struck herself as strange, but which fell like balm on the excited, irritated nerves of the man.

"Thank you. Your sympathy is precious to me beyond words, Lady Carstairs. Coming from such a woman as you, it is, indeed, encouragement to persevere in what, sometimes, seems a most difficult and thankless task." Though he made a studied effort to speak quietly, his voice shook a little, in spite of himself. Quickly recovering,

he continued: "Now perhaps I had better go out myself, and see if I can hear something of the truant. A man can make more enquiries than a woman. Your maid is still out, you say? Have you any acquaintances here?"

"Yes, I know quite a number of people. You are thinking Mrs. Boisey might have been seen by some of them? How stupid of me not to have thought of that! I will dress and go out myself. Stay, here is Carter." A knock at the door, and the maid entered. "Have you heard anything, Carter? Did you see Mrs. Boisey?"

"No, my lady. But I heard of her. Mrs. Drayton stopped me just now, and enquired for you. I told her that your ladyship was indisposed, and she said that she feared so, as she saw Mrs. Boisey go out alone. Then she laughed, and said she soon found a companion. She saw her go off in a boat with a gentleman, and board a yacht anchored in the bay."

"My God! and Mrs. Drayton the greatest gossip in or out of Town!" broke from Derwent Boisey's lips.

Violet looked at him in mingled fear, and horror.

"Are you sure, Carter? What else did Mrs. Drayton say?"

"She said Mrs. Boisey must be having a pleasant sail, quite a lengthy one—and, begging your ladyship's pardon, I thought her tone very impertinent."

"That will do Carter. Go and get my things

ready. I must see Mrs. Drayton. It was most unfortunate that I was not able to accompany Mrs. Boisey. You understand, Carter, that it was simply my terrible headache that prevented me from going on the yacht with Mrs. Boisey—”

“Yes, my lady, I understand. Indeed, I made so bold as to say so to Mrs. Drayton.”

“That was very thoughtful of you, Carter. You always do as I wish.” Lady Carstairs made a point of being considerate, and appreciative to her servants, and they were devoted to her. The maid left the room gratified at having done the right thing, and having had it recognized.

Alone with Boisey Violet went quickly up to him: “My poor friend! This is a blow—for you and I can not pretend to each other. But one thing I am sure of—it was not premeditated. She was honest in that. She had no communication with him. He has tracked her!”

“The scoundrel!”

“If you could only overtake them; get to speak with her; if you could bring her back to me; and we three could be seen here, openly together, no scandal need come of it! But perhaps we are wronging her. She may return of her own accord. She may be returning even while we are accusing her!”

“It is good of you to stand by her, Lady Carstairs. Poor girl! One should pity her, more than blame her, perhaps. But she will not return this time. Something tells me. Now I must leave you. I will do my utmost to find her. I am

nonplussed. I don't know how to begin. They have had hours of start. Lady Carstairs, if I find her, and it is not too late, I will bring her to you, and I bless you for your goodness."

When he got outside the house, he stood still for a few moments, collecting himself. Above all things he must not arouse suspicion of her. Some of these acquaintances of Lady Carstairs were also known to him and late though it was, he might chance to meet with one or more of them. He would question some of the boatmen, try and get a description of the yacht, and its owner. He might pretend that he had come down to meet a friend, that he had been delayed. He was pursuing this train of thought, as he crossed to the esplanade, when a voice he recognized at once, broke across his reverie.

"Ah, Mr. Boisey! Have you come out in search of your wife?" It was Mrs. Drayton. He looked her squarely in the face.

"Why yes! To tell you the truth I have. I hear she has stolen a march on me. I was to have been down here this morning, and then, with Lady Carstairs, we had planned a delightful day's yachting. I hear that our friend and his yacht were on time, but unfortunately I was not, and Lady Carstairs was too prostrated to think of the water."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Drayton, "I always thought you a remarkably clever writer of fiction, Mr. Boisey! But I was not aware that you and Rodney Fairfax had become friends again!"

The blow struck home, but though it hurt, Boi-sey did not wince.

"No? The world does not always discriminate. A great deal of fact is only fiction, and a great deal of fiction is really fact." With an enigmatic smile he left her.

It was true then. What could he do? The Secret Service? How it went against him. It recalled those other days of suspense, when its services had proved of no avail. Yet there was nothing else to do. A description of the yacht and its owner must be telegraphed to all likely places—but how futile! How many fishing hamlets far from telegraph and railway would be available for a yacht's anchorage. He knew of a dozen such himself on the Normandy coast, where they could be as securely hidden, as though no Secret Service existed. Some instinct told him that such was Fairfax's probable intention. He strolled down the beach, and began to talk to what boatmen were idle. Very soon he had a fairly good description of the vessel; knew that it had come in the early morning; for while the yacht's dingy had waited for Fairfax, the boatman had not proved unsociable with his kind. So Derwent learnt that *The Seagull* was a stanch yawl-rigged craft of thirty-one tons; that its crew consisted of a captain, a steward, and three sailors; that it had been in commission ready to sail at half an hour's notice for a week past; that its destination was supposed to be France. It was all he wanted to know.

He went back to Lady Carstairs. "I am going straight back to London—to Scotland Yard. The yacht is *The Seagull*, owner Rodney Fairfax. I myself shall cross over to France to-night if possible. When I have news, I will telegraph."

Wringing both her hands in his, more roughly than he was conscious of, he left her, closing the door sharply behind him.

Tears filled Violet Carstairs' eyes. A fierce longing seized her for the first time in her life, for a man's power to *act*; a rage against the conventional necessity for sitting still in such an emergency.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND you are happy? content to give yourself to me, Dorothy?"

"Dearest! I feel too blessed! So happy I almost fear!"

"Fear! Fear what, carissima?"

"Fear something will happen to rob me of what seems too great happiness for mortal possession."

It was eight in the evening. They had dined; the signs of their repast were cleared away; but not yet had they gone on deck. They were alone in the cabin. His arms were round her, her head on his shoulder. The yacht was making fair headway, with a fresh breeze; and the wash of the water against her sides was like an accompaniment to songs of passion.

"We two! Just we two!" murmured Dorothy.

"We two! loving and loved!" echoed Fairfax.

Then as he looked on her face, made beautiful by its radiant love-light, he strained her closer to him, and with his arms heavy about her, he kissed her on the lips, clinging to them.

The fever of possession was on him: this woman had given herself to him, and to-night she was beautiful. He was letting himself go; his caresses became more violent, almost rough in their assertion of masculine power; but never had his gentlest touch been so sweet to Dorothy; for now she knew she held him; saw for the first time the passionate fire of desire in his eyes, felt it throbbing in his veins. She could not speak; happiness was hers at last.

After a while, raising herself from his embrace, she said: "And we go ashore—when?"

"In two hours or thereabouts."

"And the yacht?" she queried.

"I have given instruction to the captain to run her back to Sheerness, and put her out of commission. I have given him a letter to my agent in town, on presentation of which he and the crew will be paid off. But why trouble yourself about these sordid business details, my Dorothy? Let your mind be at rest. Anticipating some such moment as this, aye, planning for it, aching for it"—he drew her close again, and she nestled to him in sensuous pleasure—"I deliberately arranged my business affairs in such a manner as to completely cut adrift from any interest in the

British Isles. The communication with my agent, of which I spoke, namely the paying off of the captain and crew of *The Seagull*, with instructions subsequently to sell the boat at public auction, definitely end my business dealings either with him or any other man in England. As far as foresight can secure anything, I have secured my complete obliteration in the United Kingdom. It will be complete." How complete an unforeseen event was destined to make it, he was not to know then!

Leaning against him in voluptuous content, she murmured, "Why not drift like this with the tide? After all, are all the other arrangements, so tiresome in their detail, worth while? Why not go on as we are, lost to everything but—this!" She pressed closer to him.

"And when the tide turns and the wind drops?" he said, half-tenderly, half-sarcastically. "Nay Dorothy, it is not only the present we must think of, but all of our future, all of it—hours, days, weeks, months, years of joy . . . would you forfeit those for the sake of the *now*?"

"No!" she cried feverishly, rising to her feet, her eyes brilliant with love's ecstasy, "Not one minute, not one second of them would I forfeit willingly. I am ready to go with you to Australia as you have arranged. You are my love, my country, my all."

Two hours later she and Fairfax were put ashore at Bognor, making connection later with the South Western main line to Plymouth. There

Fairfax found the answer to the telegram he had despatched earlier in the day from Brighton. It informed him that passages had been secured by telegraph as desired for himself and wife.

At six the next morning "Mr and Mrs. Rodney" boarded the steamship *Miltiades* of the Aberdeen line en route to Australia.

The evening editions of the London papers had each a short paragraph telling a tale of the treacherous sea—not an uncommon one as given forth by the English Channel when suddenly seized in the spasm of an ugly mood. It told of a violent squall, and possible loss of life. That was all. No one paid much attention to it. The morning papers on the following day, however, had a special press telegram headed in large type:

"DISASTER IN THE WAKE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY SQUALL IN THE CHANNEL. TOTAL WRECK OF THE SAILING YACHT *THE SEAGULL*, WITH LOSS OF ALL ABOARD. ALSO DISAPPEARANCE OF THREE-MASTED SCHOONER, WITH ALL HANDS."

A man on the lookout at the coast-guard station at Hastings had given the information to the Associated Press. He had noticed the yacht, all sail set, a little before noon; she was well off on a northerly course, making but little headway, as there was hardly a perceptible breeze stirring.

Nearer the coast a full-rigged schooner was breasting her way, a gallant sight in her pride; and a fleet of incoming fishing-boats appeared on the horizon. The sky was clear and the sun shone on the white sails of the boats, when, without warning, a mass of lowering cloud came blackening out of the west, and with it a driving rain; and wind and rain hurtled along with what seemed unreasoning, maniacal fury, obscuring all things in the horrid envelope of darkness, while the waters writhed and lashed themselves into roaring, foaming instruments of evil, white-capped. And lo! the blackness passed with lightning-like velocity, the rain ceased, and once more there was light! But of that gallant schooner and of that white-sailed yacht there was no sign. The coast-guard rubbed his eyes, but nothing showed except the fishing smacks far away on the horizon, outside the narrow danger-belt of storm.

And this man, possessed of a simplicity of soul, which invariably goes in wholesome companionship with daily and solitary communion with Mother Nature, with a God-fearing belief in the applicability of the Psalmist's power to fit any and every occasion of life, murmured to himself:

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.

"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waters thereof are still."

This tale of the sea then was the sequel to the

story of the day before, and Derwent Boisey knew the soul-sickness, that comes with realization of hardly admitted fear.

CHAPTER XXXIV

YOU know, of course? You have seen the papers?"

"Yes! What can I say to you? It is too terrible! Too sad!" Tears stood in the eyes of Violet Carstairs, as she answered Boisey.

"My God! To think that after all these years it had to come to this!" For a moment he lost control of himself. He dropped into a chair by the table, flung his arms outwards and buried his face in them.

Violet felt her heart wrung, as she gazed down upon him. That all his efforts, all his sacrifice should end thus! She laid her hand gently on his shoulder: "You have done all a man could do; more than most men would have dreamt of doing. That must console you; give you strength to bear the blow. You did your best."

"And failed!" He lifted his haggard face to hers.

"Not so! *You* have not failed! God have mercy on her. We must not judge her. She was sorely tempted. She was not like other women. . . . But is there no loophole for her fair name? Will not the world believe us, if we stand

together and defend her? Surely the fact that she was my guest, that I can declare most positively that she knew nothing of his coming, must have some weight! Is it not possible that she meant to return, that the storm drove them off their course? Oh, surely there must be some way to account for it. You, who weave such intricate plots, can not you invent one now?"

Derwent smiled sadly. "There was no storm. It was a sudden squall, as short and violent in its death as in its birth, as are the 'white squalls' of the Mediterranean."

"But is there no chance that they may have escaped? Surely, surely there must be!"

"Do you imagine that I have not thought of that? I have not slept all night. I have been down to Hastings; I have just come from there; I have seen the coast-guard myself. He affirmed that, to his belief, it was sheer impossibility for any one to have been saved. The boat was simply swallowed up—engulfed—as was the schooner. No! It is the end! the absolute end! For there is but scant possibility of even the bodies ever being recovered. It is too horrible a retribution!"

"It is! It is!" was all she could say.

"There are certain formalities to be complied with; every possible effort to guard against error; to make, what seems incontrovertible, absolute certainty. This will keep me in Town for a while. But you see how futile it all is . . . yet, while there is a chance . . . but, how can there

be . . .” His tired eyes looked strainingly into hers, then dropped in despair. “She was seen by more than one person at the pier-head waiting for him; seen to go off in the small boat, whose boatman is here to testify; seen to board the yacht, whose owner, thanks to Mrs. Drayton, has been identified; and the same was seen immediately to sail, headed to the southwest. What more can we want?”

“Yes—but—” interrupted Lady Carstairs eagerly, a sudden light illumining her face. “Oh, it has just come to me . . . when the yacht was sighted yesterday morning, before she disappeared, she was on a *northerly* course! She was *returning* then . . . don’t you see, she was coming back, she had repented probably——”

“Do you suppose that did not occur to me at once? But what difference does it make? She had left with him in the afternoon of the previous day. What did it signify that the next morning the yacht was turned about? One of her whims, doubtless. I, who know her so well can believe that—or perhaps, she did have the audacity to imagine she could return.” His face grew stern and dark as his listener had never seen it. “Perhaps that was in her mind—one could not fathom its depths; but whichever way it was, it is *the end!*”

Did Fate, that elusive jade, wrinkle her sleeve at the moment, with a mocking laugh; or did she fold that sleeve in sadness over her foreboding eyes? The end! Let us hush our voices to

reverent whisper ere we dare voice the finality of life, for:—

“That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.”

“I shall go away,” Boisey continued, “as soon as everything is settled. I am unstrung——”

“You will go away? Well, that is best perhaps. But coming now—the play——”

“Gibbon can superintend everything now, as well as I. I feel I could not bear to see it—to think of it even is a sheer impossibility. I must get right away. My mind is oppressed, bewildered by this horror.”

“I understand—oh, believe me—I understand. Wherever you are, you will remember, will you not, that my friendship and sympathy are with you!”

“It will be my one consolation!”

A week later she received a letter from him:

“As far as human intelligence can depend on circumstantial evidence all doubt is at an end. It is proved beyond question, that it was *The Seagull* which was engulfed in the Channel squall. Bits of wreckage have come ashore with the name plainly visible—one or two bodies have also drifted in, a sailor from *The Seagull*, another supposed to be one of the crew of the schooner that went down at the same time. The others may never be recovered. There is absolutely no

shadow of a hope that any of the ill-fated ones could have escaped. The coast-guard's evidence, as an eye-witness of the catastrophe, is unassailable. There is every presumptive evidence that all on both the yacht and the schooner perished in the sudden and awful visitation of Providence. . . I am going away in a few days in an effort to regain my sanity. When I am once more myself regained, I will see you——”

That night a woman added to her prayer—
“God bless him, and keep him in his wanderings; comfort him in his sorrow; and fill his heart with pure and noble purpose, granting him strength to achieve.”

The passengers on the steamship *Miltiades* were enjoying a calm and uneventful voyage, entirely ignorant of the extraordinary squall which had swooped down upon the English Channel after their departure from Plymouth. And as each day passed, the romantic possibilities the future held from them in that far-off Australian home neither wearied of picturing to the other, enwrapped both Fairfax and Dorothy in an atmosphere of absolute content.

CHAPTER XXXV

A WHOLE year passed, and Violet Carstairs received no sign from Derwent Boisey. Then a new book under his signature appeared, and so true was it to life, so intense in its realism, but withal, so full of noble purpose and human charity, that when she had devoured it from beginning to end, and loth to close the volume—still held it open upon her knee, tears were in her eyes; a blessing on her lips; for she knew that her prayer had been answered.

Two weeks after the first appearance of his work, which the publishers triumphantly announced was already in its second edition—so unequivocal was its success—he came to her.

Her woman's heart rejoiced, as she looked at him. Suffering had done its work nobly on him; exalted, not debased him.

"At last I feel able to come to you. It has been a struggle, but I have had one thought, one memory to sustain me—the thought of you—of your sweet sympathy—your loyalty in my hour of need."

She gloried in him, as he spoke. He had always been admirable to her; but now, he was kingly among men.

"I read the book. I understood. My heart has been filled with gratitude that you were sustained in the way that I knew you would follow,

though it might be with difficulty and pain!" He worshipped her with his eyes, as she spoke.

"You know," he said later, "what I have come to say—I love you, Violet . . . You are not angry with me for telling you so abruptly?"

She had turned her head aside; she hardly dared allow him to see the joy that was hers. But at the break of anxiety in his voice, she turned again—towards him: "It is what I have waited to hear!" she murmured.

"My darling! My well-beloved!" he cried, gathering her in his arms; and then her sweet face raised to his, he kissed her; kissed her with a kiss that had all of love's passion, and all of love's reverence—manhood's highest tribute to purity of womanhood.

"Violet," he said, presently, "you will not be afraid to become my wife?"

"Afraid?" she laughed softly, a happy challenge in her eyes.

"Ah, but I must explain. Do you know this English law of ours will not hold a person dead on presumptive evidence? Although you and I and all the world have no shadow of a doubt as to the fate of that poor, unhappy woman, the Law does not recognize it as absolute. In the eyes of the Law, though the Church unite us with full faith in its right, our marriage might be considered illegal. That is the whole unhappy truth, dear——"

She interrupted him with a laugh. "Do you think that bugaboo of a possibility would count

for anything with the woman who loves you? Do we always have to *see* tangible proof of what we *know*? If there were as you say, the shadow of a doubt, you and I would not rest until we had proved it shadow or substance. But when it is beyond doubt—oh, Derwent, what need was there for you to speak of this—— I believe in you; I think of you only, your happiness——”

And as they sat side by side, hand in hand, that wonderful mystery of perfect peace and comfort, when soul rests with soul, assured of mutual love, after stress of suffering and absence, was theirs.

“My wife to be, you will not keep me waiting!”

“It shall be when you will, my Derwent!” she answered, lifting her eyes to rest on his, beautiful with their soft radiance of womanly trust and love.

And the heart of Derwent Boisey at last found rest.







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